AN ANALYSIS OF ELIZABETHAN, AND SOME TWENTIETH CENTURY METHODS OF PRODUCING SHAKESPERE'S HAMLET

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FOREWORD

During the past half-century, there has been a growing tendency to take Shakespere from the theatre and place him on the bookshelves of educational institutions and private homes. Consequently, Shakespere is thought of more in literary than in theatrical terms, and there has grown up a whole generation of people whose closest association with Shakespere has been in the school or college classroom. In his day, the plays were witnessed, heard, and felt; even in our grandfathers' and fathers' day there were still repertory companies which presented Shakespere as a part of their regular programme. Our own generation is one of the few, since the plays were written, to see creditable performances of the plays only at well-spaced intervals, and then usually in large theatrical centres such as London or New York.

The reasons for this situation are many, and it will be part of the function of this thesis to explain them. Of Shakespere's plays, Hamlet was a logical choice by which to follow the history of production methods. From the time it was produced at the Globe playhouse in Shakespere's day, to the latest production in our own, it has been the most widely played piece of English drama both on the English-speaking and foreign stage. For this reason, more material, both of a theoretical and a practical nature is available.

Chapter I of this thesis is mainly introductory, since it gives a brief review of the development of the drama and the theatre to Shakespere's day. It includes also, a short biography of the poet

in relation to the theatre for which he wrote.

Chapter II concerns the production of Hamlet at the Globe playhouse, with whose company Shakespere was associated. The term "Elizabethan" is applied to this period although it embraces only the last five or six years of Elizabeth's reign, and the first twelve years of James I's reign, to 1616, the time of Shakespere's death. The Globe, besides being Shakespere's own theatre, was a representative Elizabethan playhouse, and a description of its production methods is an adequate picture of those in any open-air theatre of that day.

In Chapter III, the history of subsequent productions of Hamlet is traced briefly, along with new trends in the theatre of to-day. The four modern productions selected for more detailed description represent not only the more widely-known, but perhaps the best productions in terms of artistic achievement. One obstacle offered the writer here, is the necessity of relying on the reviews written by the critics of the theatre, instead of on personal experience, for this analysis. An attempt has been made, however, to overcome this obstacle by incorporating the aims and ideas of the producers of these presentations. The term "producers" embodies the director, the actors, and the stage designer, although used in the singular form in England, it is the equivalent of the American, "director."

And finally, Chapter IV is an analysis of not only the four modern productions already mentioned, but of the various methods of

producing Hamlet on our modern Anglo-American stage. The aim is to show that this play, like nearly all of Shakespere's works, is not only timeless, but timely, and while no one production can be considered definitive, it is fulfilling its function by keeping Shakespere alive for the public who see his plays.

> The old orthodoxies have long since disappeared. One thing at least we have all come to know about Shakespere on the contemporary stage, and that is there is no one way in which any of his plays must be done. His dramas are variables, capable of infinite and exciting theatrical restatements. Our single hope, as Arthur Hopkins once expressed it, is to have the radium of Shakespere released from the vessel of tradition. We want his plays dusted and their bones shaken. We do not care how they come to life, so long as they live, and living do justice to the joys and sublimities of his texts. We want the theatre to protect him from his weaknesses, redeem him from his epoch, and expose us to all that is timeless in his work. We refuse to have him left in his Stratford tomb, and the theatre refuses to leave him there. The real truth is he refuses to stay there himself. 1

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1 Brown, John Mason, Two on the Aisle, New York, 1938, p. 24.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEATRE TO SHAKESPERE'S DAY: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

The theatre of Athens in the Golden Age of Greece, and the Globe playhouse in Elizabethan days at first glance may seem to be too remote for comparison. Nearly two thousand years in time, and miles in space separated them; but in the rise, development and decay of the drama each represented they are amazingly similar. Both had their origin in the practice of religious rites; both flourished at a time when the nation of which they were a part had reached a peak of achievement and renown. The degeneration of both was marked by a degeneration of the playgoing portion of the society which had supported it. And finally, the note of joyousness and vigour that accompanied the beginnings of both the Greek and the English drama, characterized them throughout their development. At their respective peaks, in Pericles' time and in Elizabeth's, they were presented in open-air theatres to audiences that were strikingly similar in that they each represented a cross section of the society of their age.

The drama, as we know it, began with the annual rites of the Greeks in connection with their worship of the wine-god, Dionysus. Originally, it was a combination of dancing and chanting; gradually, however, one figure began to stand out from the others who became known as the Chorus. If we are to believe legend, it was Thespis who introduced this novelty, and so became the first actor. In the fifth century B. C., the Golden Age of Greece, came Aeschylus, whom Aristotle credits with introducing the second character, and Sophocles who introduced a third. They, along with

Euripides, were the great writers of Greek tragedy. To this golden record was added the comedy of Aristophanes. The Greeks, then, originated the two main forms of the drama - tragedy and comedy. They presented their plays in amphitheatres, of which the stage was a semi-circular space where the chorus danced and sang. This space was called the orchestra, from the Greek word, 'orchester', meaning 'dancer'. Back of the orchestra was a tent or building called the skene where the actors and chorus changed masks and costumes.

There followed the decay of Greek culture, and the conquest of Greece by the Romans who were, in turn, conquered by that same culture, adapting it to their own uses and tastes. In the hands of the Romans, the drama became a greatly inferior art. Fond of spectacle and coarse display, they robbed the drama of its original raison d'être, and it became primarily a source of amusement. It lacked, too, the theme of nationalism which was a part of both the Greek and the Elizabethan drama. Instead, the Roman theatre was frankly one of gorgeous and extravagant spectacle, including hundreds of men, horses, barbaric animals, or perhaps a captive king or slaves in chains.[1] The Roman stage, therefore, was an immense platform, and the auditorium seated not hundreds, but thousands who thronged it on holidays which were usually the occasion of stage presentations.

> The Greek theatres had never really been designed. They grew as their function developed....It is on the architectural side that the Latin contribution is made....The Romans were tremendously efficient. They could do everything for the theatre except provide it with a play. [2]

Plautus, Terence, and Seneca, from whom Shakespere borrowed liberally, made the only real contribution to dramatic literature and form, but in comparison with that of the Greeks, it was a minor one.

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1 Cheney, S., The Theatre, New York, 1939, p. 93.

2 Stevens, T. W., The Theatre from Athens to Broadway, New York, 1932, pp. 41-43.

In the middle of the fourth century, there came the fall of the mighty Roman Empire; Constantinople became the capital, and a Barbarian chieftain replaced the Roman Emperor.

> That, according to all who witnessed this sad event, was the end of the power of Rome. Yet, in a way it was really the beginning. For Rome was once more to rule the world. But this time her conquests were not to be made by means of the sword. 3

No, this time her conquests were made by the Cross of Christ for the Roman Catholic Church. It was this church that decreed in the year 314 that by mounting the stage, actors gave their support to the worship of false gods, and so the art of acting was banned. Incogruously enough, in the worship within this same church throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries the drama once more came to life.

It was the thin but tenuous thread of the minstrel and jongleur that kept the drama alive. Among the nobility, these entertainers were popular throughout the Middle Ages. They sang of dramatic deeds; they chanted tales of love, of courage, of legendary heroes. Those who were not sponsored by the nobility were less fortunate. They toured the provinces in small bands, suffering "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune", and ending up, more often than not, in the town stocks. It was these people who preserved what Chambers calls the "mimetic instinct" in the people.

In its conquest of pagan peoples, the church had chosen wisely to incorporate many pagan customs into its worship. Many of our Christmas customs today are remnants of pagan practices, such as the hauling of the Yule log, the Christmas tree, the lavish feasts. Easter, too, was a cere-

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3 Van Loon, H. W. The Arts, New York, 1939, p. 130.

mony closely allied to pagan rites. But the problem of the medieval clergy was to make understandable the Christian teachings and the Biblical stories to their parishoners who, for the most part, could neither read nor write. They could, however, listen and watch, and so it was that the first two principles of the theatre - to be heard and to be seen - were applied to the clergy's problem. They, of course, had no notion as to where their efforts would lead; their simple aim was to teach the people and further the worship of God.

In the Roman Catholic Church there were regular canonical hours when services took place, such as matins and vespers. There were also seasonal observances coming within the liturgical framework. About the eighth or ninth century there was added to the regular liturgy on Easter day an embellishment not taken directly from the gospel narrative. This trope or embellishment was the earliest dramatic germ. Its dramatic possibilities were not realized until the trope was inserted before the Te Deum and placed closer to such religious ceremonies as the Depositio Crucis and the Elevatio Crucis. The Depositio was sung usually on Good Friday, and the series of rites in connection with this led to the dramatization of the trope.

Various parts were taken by the choir, and, as in the Greek drama, one voice was separated from the others. Finally, the different parts were acted as well as sung, and the members of the clergy wore robes fitting the parts they played. The Depositio and Elevatio ceremonies, combined with the Adoratio, became known (to posterity at least) as the Quem Quaeritis trope. One of the clergy sits, garbed like an angel by the "sepulchrum". Three figures (the three Maries) approach and the seated figure chants.

"Quem Quaritis in sepulchro, Christocolae."

"Jesum Nazarenum Crucifixum, O Caelicolae," he is answered in unison by the three.

As time passed, there was a further development: each of the three began to assume individual differences. At this time the "stage" directions become more elaborate, as do the costumes and the dialogue. The costumes, as already suggested, were symbolical, and the chanting and the dialogue were in Latin. "Up to the fourteenth century, the plays were much the same in all countries, but after the introduction of the vernacular, each country followed an independent line of development."[4] And with the introduction of the vernacular, the plays became secularized. They had become too unwieldly - the costumes were too elaborate, and the locus of presentation had moved from the sanctuary to the transept and into the nave. Sheldon Cheney has this comment to make:

> The altar area without change is one of the most beautiful and theatrical stages in the world....and when a little later the plays were transferred to the steps and porch before the church, could any more fitting formal stage be devised than this one with its rich cathedral-portal background with the architectural facade rising to be lost in spires far above? [5]

These were advantages, however, which were unappreciated by the fourteenth century dramatists.

The church was gradually losing its grip on this form of teaching, and possibly looked on it as a mother does her wayward son. There had been three steps in this process of alienation from the church, the first being the introduction of dialogue, the second, the use of the vernacular, along

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[4] Schweickert, Early English Plays, New York, 1928, p. 18.

[5] Cheney, S., Stage Decoration, New York, 1928, p. 19.

with certain secular elements, and finally the third stage - the composition of plays in the vernacular especially for the church. At this stage, laymen were playing the parts and supplying many of the costumes and properties; herein is another reason that the drama was weaned away from the church.

From this time on, there were two distinct trends: the secularizing of the subject matter of the plays, and the taking over of their production by the trade guilds. The first was a gradual change, and the second, almost immediate. The latter change was the result of a desperate attempt on the part of the church to keep the drama as a part of its religious ritual. They forbade the clergy to act in the church.

> The result of this prohibition was distinctly not that which was desired; it merely threw the drama into the hands of those people among whom it was to flourish luxuriantly. The town guilds took over the representation of the plays and carried on the tradition to the sixteenth century. 6

The miracle-mystery plays[7] were produced by the guild in sequences, of which there were four great cycles in English, each named after the cities where they were presented. These are: Chester, Coventry, York, and Wakefield. A fifth, the Cornwall cycle, was written in the Cornish dialect. The plays in these cycles encompassed Biblical events starting with the Creation and ending with the Judgment Day. Their production was the responsibility of the town corporation which allotted the various plays to the various guilds. In doing this, the particular occupation of each guild was taken into consideration. For instance, the order of the "pageants of the York Cycle in the third year of the reign of King Henry V, anno 1415" lists:

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6 Nicoll, A., The British Drama, London, 1925, p. 25.

7 The compound term is used for brevity. The miracle plays dealt with the lives of the saints. The name came from the Latin 'miraculum' - a general

Shipwrights--God warning Noah to make an Ark of floatable wood.

Goldsmiths, gold-beaters, and money makers--The three kings coming from the East....offering gifts. [8]

Although some of the plays have been presented throughout the year, the occasion of the presentation of the whole cycle was the celebration of Corpus Christi, a time of year suitable for outdoor productions.[9] The plays were presented on pageants which were six-wheeled, double-decker wagons. The action took place on the upper deck, and the lower part which was curtained was used by the actors for changing costumes. Considerable sums of money were spent on costumes, which, like those of the church productions, were symbolical. God was always dressed in white with gold hair and whiskers; the devil was dressed in black leather and carried a wooden fork. To the accompaniment of strange noises he leaped out of the Hell-mouth, an interesting and important piece of stage property consisting of two mammoth jaws painted red, with some device for producing smoke, and for the rattling of pots and pans.

Each pageant had its own set of actors, costumes and properties. The cycle might be presented in one day, or on two or three successive days. The first wagon started off from the church at an early hour (4:30 a.m.), and after receiving the bishop's blessing, produced its play, probably the Creation. It then moved on to the next station, followed by the second guild wagon with the next play in the cycle, and so on, until the cycle was completed. Guild

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term for anything of a religious nature. Mysteries deal with Biblical stories, the term "mystere" being a corruption of the word "metier".

8 Schweikert, p. 241.

9 i.e., the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday.

vied with guild to make its part of the production the most impressive, and sizeable sums were spent on costumes and acting. Undoubtedly, too, town vied with town in the presentation of the complete cycle.

To the liturgical drama more and more of the secular was introduced. The interest of the anonymous author and the audience was irresistably attracted to the human side of man's nature - the side that erred and suffered, that hated, loved and laughed. Tragedy was too difficult for these fourteenth century people to depict; they were able to portray only physical tragedy. For example, Christ is reviled, scourged, and spat upon, but his mental and spiritual anguish is not even suggested. Farce and straight comedy were easier, and in these elements the plays abound.

Hitherto austere characters of the Bible suffered a great loss of dignity. Noah is beaten by his wife, Herod "ruaging in the streetes" is almost a comic figure, and one of the shepherds in the Second Shepherd's Play steals a lamb which he attempts to disguise as his new-born infant from the other shepherds. His ruse is discovered and the results are hilarious. This play is the first strictly English piece of comedy. The significance of this is that the characters were being humanized; the subject matter was nominally Biblical, but the people in the plays were "true-born Englishmen".

A second type of early English drama was the Morality play. These developed independently of the Miracle-Mysteries, but were similar to them in many respects. Their purpose was to bolster the teachings of Christianity, and their form was allegorical. It was the struggle between Vice and Virtue that was depicted, and these, as well as the thoughts and conflicting

emotions of man, were personified. Virtue was beset by Gluttony, Pride, Bad Deeds, Folly, and the Devil himself; but at the close of the play, Virtue was triumphant. The Devil and his assistants were among the most likeable and humorous characters in the play, which was episodic rather than plotted. The best example of this type of drama is Everyman, written in straightforward English couplet form. It outlines the Medieval church's scheme for the salvation of man's soul, but despite this lofty theme, the characters, Goods, Fellowship, Kindred, Five Wits, and even Death - all are live and human people, English people. This was the saving grace of the Moralities: the humanizing of the characters more than made up for the high moral tone of the play.

The link between the Moralities and Shakespere's plays is a strong one; the Vice, which became a comic character, has its counterpart in the court Fool, and Feste and Touchstone are the spiritual descendants of this stock character of the Moralities. The struggle between the various elements in man's nature was depicted in the Moralities by personifications of these elements. It was the same sort of struggle that confronted Hamlet, but Shakespere depicted it as a warring within Hamlet's own soul.

A third type of English drama, the Interlude, was later in origin than the first two, similar in idea, but different in its manner of presentation. The Miracle-Mysteries and Moralities were designed for the purpose of teaching; the Interludes were frankly to entertain. The former were still attached to the church in that the clergy took a hand in their writing and production; the latter were presented by bands of professional players rather than amateurs, and on indoor stages rather than on pageants or temporary outdoor stages. The most illustrious writer of these interludes was John Heywood, whose work marks

the first appearance in England of a dramatic production intended wholly to amuse. The English drama was beginning to take conscious form, and at the same time was becoming realisitc, instead of abstract, entertaining instead of didactic.

From this time on, great progress was made. Such comedies as Ralph Roister Doister, and Gammer Gurton's Needle were the first of their kind in English drama, and approximately twenty years after their composition, in 1565, the first English tragedy appeared, called Gorboduc, and written by Sackville and Norton. Such plays were produced in the schools and colleges; interludes and Court comedies were presented on a raised platform in the hall of some wealthy patron of the drama, or in the Court itself. In the Innyards, however, the popular drama flourished, and this is where the man on the street, his wife and his neighbour witnessed the plays. A rude temporary platform was erected at one end or across one corner of the rectangular yard. The people to whom a penny meant a lot, stood around this platform, while those who could afford it, as well as the guests of the inn, watched from the vantage point offered by the inn's two or three galleries. It was this principle - that of the open yard surrounded by tiered galleries - that James Burbage applied when he built the first public playhouse in England in 1576. It was built in Shoreditch, a freehold territory outside the City limits, and therefore outside the jurisdiction of the city fathers, and was called simply, "The Theatre". A second influence in the construction of this building was found in the bear baiting pits, which were circular wooden structures, and open to the sky.

There is one other form of English drama leading to that of Shakespere's

predecessors, and that is the chronicle history. From this source, Shakespere borrowed liberally. Although they had little in them of plot or characterization, the dialogue is poetic, and the action romantic. They were characteristic of the Elizabethan age in that they unfolded England's history to its people who were thirsty for such knowledge.

The English drama and theatre at this time provide a curious contrast to that of Italy and the Continent. In Italy there was enthusiastic patronage and fostering of the arts which resulted in the building of magnificent theatres with perspective settings designed by the famed Italian architect, Serlio. The productions, elaborately staged and costumed, were usually sponsored by ruling noble families, and to the spirit of competition between them in the drama, as in most affairs, can be credited much of the sumptuousness of the productions. But the English drama was ahead of the Italian drama in one important respect: it was being provided with plays by a group of dramatists who rank high in achievement in comparison with any tongue or any age. There were Shakespere's predecessors, the University Wits.

> The classicists had form, but no fire; the popular dramatists had interest, but little sense of form. Drama, that is to say, was struggling between a well-formed chill and a structureless enthusiasm. 10

It was the University Wits who removed the chill, and added structure to the drama. There were seven of them - Lyly, Kyd, Lodge, Peele, Greene, Nashe, and, the greatest of them all, Kit Marlowe. With the exception of Kyd they were all university men; most of them lived bohemian lives, and most of them died young. Their contributions to the form and content of

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10 Nicoll, Allardyce, British Drama, p. 73.

English drama made it possible for Shakespere to bend his genius towards the perfecting, rather than the creation, of that same form and content.

Thomas Lodge and Thomas Nashe made their contributions largely in the field of fiction; George Peele left five plays of widely diversified theme and treatment, the best known being The Old Wives' Tale. Lyly, who wrote for the Boys of St. Paul's and of the Royal Chapel, was responsible for a strong influence towards the refining not only of the language, but of dramatic content as well. The Euphuistic style, which he originated, greatly influenced Shakespere in his earlier works. Lyly's innovation of writing in prose instead of blank verse, was also important. Robert Greene carried the development of plot and characterization further, and contributed the first truly feminine character in English drama, Margaret, the Fair Maid of Fressingfield, in Greene's comedy, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay.

Thomas Kyd, although not strictly a member of the University Wits, is of particular interest to this study as the writer of a play which presumably inspired the writing of Hamlet. The play referred to is The Spanish Tragedy, one of a type known as Revenge plays, derived from a form originated by Seneca. In these, the ghost of a murdered man visits a son or close friend, urging him to revenge the murder. This theme captivated the fancy of Elizabethans who firmly believed in the dogma, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth". The Ghost appears at the end of the play and reviews its events:

> Horatio murdered in his father's bower,
> Vile Serberine by Pedringana slain;
> False Pedringana hanged by quaint device;
> Fair Isabella by herself misdone;
> Prince Balthazar by Bel-imperia stabbed;
> The Duke of Castile and his wicked son
> Both done to death by old Hieronimo;
> My Bel-imperia fallen, as Dido fell,
> And good Hieronimo slain by himself.
> Ay, these were spectacles to please my soul.' 11

11 Schweikert, H. C., p. 522.

The Elizabethans shuddered, and enjoyed them too.

In addition to the main theme of revenge, Hamlet offers many points of comparison with The Spanish Tragedy. As stage pieces both were effective - night scenes, madness, feigned or real, the presentation of a play-within-a-play, the tension of crossed purposes, and the final scenes in which the revenger meets death in carrying out his revenge - all these explain the popularity of The Spanish Tragedy and of Hamlet with Elizabethan audiences. But it is the greater subtlety with which Shakespere handled his hero, the magnificence of the dramatic poetry, the well-knit construction of Hamlet, that have wrought its timelessness as a dramatic presentation. Modern productions of Hamlet are one of the theatre's biggest drawing cards, while few know that a play called The Spanish Tragedy was written by an Elizabethan by the name of Thomas Kyd.

The last of Shakespere's predecessors, and the greatest, is Christopher Marlowe. Four of his plays, all tragedies, are worth mentioning: Tamburlaine the Great, Dr. Faustus, The Jew of Malta, and Edward II. The epithets, "Marlowe's mighty line", and "high astounding terms have been worn thin; yet they best describe what is typical of him. Starting with Tamburlaine, the most bombastic of his heroes, and ending with Mortimer in Edward II, all are supermen whose "looks do menace Heaven and dare the Gods". All of them are swayed by the creed of Machiavelli. Shakespere follows this lead when he has Richard, the Humpback, say: "I am resolved to be a villain", for to Elizabethans, the "Murderous Machiavel" was not a political theorist, but purely and simply a villain and a teacher of villainy.

The thunderous roll of Marlowe's lines is often alleviated by lovely poetry that comes like a soft breeze after a mighty gale. Marlowe, although he developed tragedy to a new peak in depicting the struggle within a man's soul, was unable to give the Elizabethan drama two things: first, comedy that would not only provide a relief from the tenseness of tragedy but would also serve to heighten the effect. Secondly, he failed to portray women adequately, and his female characters are mere shadows. A third defect is apparent in Marlowe's work and that is the tendency to make the hero or rather, the Protagonist, stand alone.

> Why man, he doth bestride the narrow world
> Like a colossus; and we petty men
> Walk under his huge legs.

So it was with the other members of the cast of Marlowe's plays.

As stage presentations, however, Marlowe's plays were immensely popular, and they provided "fat" parts for the leading man of Philip Henslowe's Company, Edward Allen. These presentations were made on much the same stage and under the same conditions as described for the Globe playhouse in the following chapter. No doubt the later playhouses were finer buildings, and certain stage practices were refined and improved. In An Apologie for Poetry Sir Philip Sydney speaks thus of dramatic practices of his day:

> You shal have Asia of the one side, and Affrick of the other; and so many other under-kingdoms that the Player when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or els the tale wil not be conceived. Now ye shal have these Ladies walke to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a Garden. By and by we heare newes of a Shipwracke in the same place and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that, comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bounde to take it for a cave. While in the meantime, two armies flye in, represented with four swords and bucklers; and then what harde heart will not receive it for a pitched fielde?

Presumably, it was our Elizabethan imagination that resented such a vigorous work-out. Shakespere, however, refrained from overburdening his audience in this respect, and most of his plays make a reasonable observance of the unity of place.

Before going on to an account of Shakespere's life and works, a brief picture should be given of London where the arts of the theatre flourished. The city had thrived in the years preceding and during Elizabeth's reign, and it had become the centre of the far-flung and newly-opened trade routes. London was a boom town of approximately 200,000 people and all roads led to it, just as all sea-lanes converged in the Thames. In London was the Queen's court. Here the new middle-class had arisen, and the new luxuries, extravagances and wealth attending such prosperity enjoyed by the middle and upper classes, had helped foster the growth of another group, the Puritans. Rebelling against these "evils", the Puritans strangely enough, made London their chief stronghold.

And finally, it was to London that Englishmen turned not only for fashionable tastes and vices, but for amusement. The city supported an average of five public theatres at one time and it was for one of these, the Globe, that Shakespere's plays were written and produced.

> The palace was the point of vantage from which the stage won its way against the linked opposition of an alienated pulpit and an alienated municipality to an ultimate entrenchment of economic independence. 12

This statement of Chambers needs a word of explanation: the "alienated pulpit" was that of the Puritans, and the "alienated municipality" was that of the city of London. Alienated from what or whom? From the Court and the Queen. The city fathers had wrested a minimum of independence from the court

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12 Chambers, E. K., Oxford, 1923), The Elizabethan Stage, I, p. 3.

and were guarding it jealously; any encroachment on this new-found authority was summarily dealt with. They feared the acting companies for two reasons: political and hygienic. The danger of demonstrations and riots among the playgoers was one they wished to avoid at any cost, for more than once the crowds in the pit had been stirred to boiling point by speeches of the actors. The second danger was more real; the plague was easily spread among the closely packed playhouse crowds. As controllers of all amusement in the city, the City Fathers wielded a double edged weapon: they could say "Where" and "When" to the Players about the performances and subject matter of the plays. This restriction led to the building of the public playhouses in the liberties and freeholds in and near the city, - districts over which the civic officials had no jurisdiction.

The Puritans were not worried so much about the minds and bodies of the playhouse audiences; they were worried about their souls. Display of any kind was wicked to the Puritans; but display of costumes, emotions, and passions earned for the beholders, as well as the performers, the eternal pangs of hellfire. In addition to this, there was another pitfall - the Bankside, the ultimate centre of theatrical activity, was uncomfortably close to the "stews," and the lords' rooms in the playhouses were put to an unworthy use by the hot-blooded young gallants and their "ladies."

And so the Court, seeing an opportunity to kill, or at least maim, two birds with one stone, extended a helping hand to the struggling players who were hounded by the city fathers and the Puritans - both factions being enemies of the Court. By virtue of this recognition, the social and financial status of actors was raised considerably, and, from being "rogues and beggars," they rose to positions not only of wealth and substance, but of reputation and regard.

And finally, London was the heartbeat of an England that was poised between two terrible internecine wars - the Wars of the Roses, and the Puritan Revolution. At the same time it was sloughing off the scales of medievalism and eagerly reaching out to grasp the significance and the wealth, the wonder and the power of this brave new world. England was in a state of flux, and Englishmen were "plotting the rules of the game" by the long-approved method of trial and rejection. It was in this England that William Shakespeare was born and lived. It was this England for which and about which he wrote his plays.

We know discouragingly few facts about the life of William Shakespere; these few are the pegs on which scholars have hung the garments of conjecture, and many of the pegs are sadly overloaded. The baptismal record of the Holy Trinity Church of Stratford in the County of Warwick has an entry dated April 26, 1564, "Guilemus filius Johannes Shakspere"[19]. The high mortality rate among infants at that time made necessary almost immediate baptism, and it was performed usually on the third day after birth. His birthday, then, was probably April 23; fifty-two years later on this same April day William Shakespere died in the town of his birth.

> There is a probability that the poet came of good yeoman stock, and that his ancestors to the fourth or fifth generation were fairly substantial landowners. [20]

His father, John, was born at Snitterfield, four miles north of Stratford-on-Avon, and, in 1551, left the family property for the wider opportunities offered in Stratford to a young man of business ability. From the first he prospered, setting up business as a dealer in agricultural products - wool, meat, leather, corn and malt. He was shrewd, too, in the choice of a wife,

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19 Spencer, Hazleton, The Art and Life of William Shakespeare, New York: 1940, p.8.

20 Lee, Sidney, A Life of William Shakespeare. New York: 1898. See ch. I "Parentage and Birth" for a comprehensive account of the poet's ancestry.

one, Mary Arden, daughter of the wealthy and influential Arden family, also of Warwickshire. It is useless to imagine to what extent she helped to mould the mind and spirit of her illustrious son; it is only natural to suggest that it was she who first "bent the twig".

The John Shakesperes continued to prosper. John successively held positions of mounting importance in the municipal government, until in 1568 he attained the peak of his career as bailiff of the borough. He had bought two houses, in one of which - a double house on Henley Street - his third child, William, was born. In all, there were eight children of whom three died in infancy.

It is important to note that the Grammar School which, it is supposed, Shakespere attended, was of high academic standing, its masters being graduates of Oxford. Dover Wilson emphasizes this, along with the gentle upbringing of the poet's mother in order to "combat the notion that Shakespeare grew up 'with illiterate relatives in a bookless neighbourhood'".[21] Dr. Wilson further declares that

> There were excellent alternatives to Grammar School at that time, which would be fitter nurseries for dramatic genius and more in keeping with that passion for music which we know Shakespeare possessed. [22]

The alternative he suggests as an explanation of how the boy became an actor is the education as a singing-boy in the service of some great Catholic nobleman, "since the transition from singing-boy to stage player was almost as inevitable at that period as the breaking of the male voice in adolescence."[23]

Apparently Shakespere's father, an ardent Roman Catholic, had fallen

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21 Wilson, D., The Essential Shakespeare. Cambridge: 1932, p. 40. The sub-quotation is from Halliwell-Phillips Outlines.

22 Ibid., p. 41.

23 Loc. cit.

into ill favour in the town, possibly because of his recusant tendencies, and as a result, his fortunes were on the ebb. This explains William's withdrawal from the Grammar School, and gives some support to Dr. Wilson's theory of his training at the court of some Catholic nobleman. Again, we are in the dark, but wherever he received his schooling, he made good use of it. If he was the "whining schoolboy with his satchel and shining morning face, creeping like snail unwillingly to school", then he found the uses of this 'adversity' sweet.

Of his boyhood - his work, his pastimes, his youthful hopes and ideals - we know nothing in fact, and very little in conjecture. It is certain, however, that he had keen powers of observation, and an even keener appreciation of what he observed. Like Wordsworth, early in life he could have said:

> Thus were my sympathies enlarged, and thus
> Daily the common range of visible things
> Grew dear to me. 24

Passages from any of his plays are a testimony to this, but in one of his poems, Venus and Adonis, the 'unpolisht lines' which were the 'first heir of his invention', we can grasp not only the beauty, but the accuracy of his observations.

> Or as the snail, whose tender horns being hit
> Shrinks backward in his shelly cave with pain
> And there, all smother'd up, in shade doth sit
> Long after fearing to creep forth again. 25

Assuming that The Winter's Tale belongs to the group of plays which is latest in order of composition, we notice that the poet loses none of his

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24 Lee, Sidney, p. 16.

25 Venus and Adonis, ll. 852-858.

powers of observation or appreciation after being away from Stratford for over twenty years. Perdita says:

> O Proserpina
> For the flowers, now, that, frighted thou letts't fall
> From Dis's wagon! Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty; violets dim
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
> Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses
> That die unmarried ere they can behold
> Bright Phoebus in his strength.

It is a painting by Botticelli - the Prima Vera;[26] but more than that, it is a description to kindle a response in the hearts of Englishmen; for everyone knows that wherever you find an Englishman, even in the remote corners of the earth, there you will find a patch of garden!

The next recorded date in the poet's biography is the year 1582 when entries of November 27 in the Bishop of Worcester's Register reveal the marriage of William Shakespere, a minor, to Anne Hathaway, daughter of a prosperous farmer of the district, a woman eight years his senior.[27] Six months later, their first child, Susanna, was born; three years after that there came twins, Hamnet and Judith. Then, says Hazleton Spencer, "there were no more children - strong evidence in those days for the spouses' separation."[28] When next we hear of Shakespere, he is in London, and has earned for himself a reputation as poet, playwright, and actor. He has earned, too, the undying hatred of Robert Greene, the contemporary dramatist who wrote in 1592:

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26 The Winter's Tale, Act IV, Sc. III.

27 Clemence Dane's three-act play, Will Shakespeare; (An Invention) gives an interesting interpretation of Shakespere's wife.

28 Spencer, H. p. 17.

> There is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his 'Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hide' supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blanke verse as the best of you; and being an absolute 'Johannes factotum' is, in his owne conceit, the onely Shakescene in a countrie. 29

The 'upstart Crow' must have been receiving loud acclaim from London playgoers to so annoy a man who enjoyed an excellent literary reputation of his own, with a prodigious list of novels, plays, and pamphlets to his credit. Shakespere had found his niche, and contemporary playwrights had found a formidable rival.

It is not known what he did between 1585, the time he supposedly left Stratford, and 1592 when he had made his reputation on the stage. Rowe, the first real biographer of the poet, whose Life of Shakespeare was published in 1709, credits his sudden departure from the town of his birth to the much-discussed deer-stealing incident. Another anecdote relates that he was introduced to the theatrical arts by serving as a groom to the acting company of the Theatre, and holding the heads of the horses while their owners, the London dandies, dismounted. One of the more creditable stories concerning this completely fabled part of his life suggests that he spent a term or two as a country schoolmaster. Here, indeed, he would have had a chance to augment his learning. The important thing is that he did go to London and became associated with one or another of the playing companies.

There is one consoling thought: unlike theatrical centres to-day, such as London, New York, or even Hollywood, there were few doors for the aspiring

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29 Greene, Robt. A Groatsworth of Wit, 1592. "Our" refers to the University Wits; the "Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hide" is a parody of a line from Shakespere's Henry VI, Part III, 'O Tyger's hart wrapt in a woman's hide' (I-iv-137).

actor or dramatist to knock upon. Then, too, there was a tremendous demand for new plays, and for playwrights to furnish them. Yet, it would take at least two theatrical seasons for an actor to become well known by the crowd, and so we conclude that Shakespere must have been acting and writing for the theatres for at least three years before the date when Greene, on his deathbed, lashes out at him as a 'Johannes factotum.' He is thought to have associated himself first with Lord Strange's Men, the leading company of that period.

Although he had found his niche in the theatre, he had not chosen a happy time to do so. The plague broke out with renewed vigour; the theatres were promptly closed by the City Fathers, and they remained so almost continuously for two years. The acting companies, in consequence, were forced to go 'on the road', a journey hazardous for them in more ways than one. Shakespere presumably had the choice of accompanying them, or remaining in the city. Presumably he chose the latter course, for it was at this time that he became known as a poet. Following the fashion of the day, he enlisted the patronage of a wealthy noble, Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton. To him were dedicated Shakespere's poems, Venus and Adonis, in 1593, and The Raveyshment of Lucrece in 1594. Both poems met with unparalleled success; both author and patron earned considerable fame by them, although Southampton's was vicarious fame alone.

How long this arrangement lasted, it is difficult to judge. Southampton is also credited with being "the onlie begetter of these ensuing sonnets", although some scholars insist that it was the Earl of Pembroke to whome they were addressed.[30] The necessity for such an arrangement, however, was soon

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30 Murry, J. M., Shakespeare. London, 1936. C4.

removed, for the theatres re-opened, and Shakespere continued his career as an actor and dramatist. In 1598 Francis Meres in Palladis Tamia mentions Shakespere as "the reincarnation of the soul of Ovid"; then, "as Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage."[31]

Thirty-seven of his plays are extant, and several others are attributed to his pen. The reason for doubt concerning the latter and the use of such careful phrasing as, "Considered to be", "reckoned by most", or "usually attributed to" and other vague phrases may, be found in our knowledge of the haphazard system of printing the plays. In the first place, once written, they belonged to the acting companies, not to the author. They were written to be played, not to be acted, and remained in the possession of the company for which they were written. Rival companies, however, had the nasty habit of sending 'reporters' to copy the lines of the plays as they were given in the public playhouses. They returned to their sponsors frequently with hashed-up versions of the plays and so printing them was simply a means of foiling piracy. Margaret Webster offers an interesting argument against some scholars' claims that this or that play was printed solely from actors' scripts, saying, "We wonder whether research professors have ever seen a set of actors' parts, such as are left, in the state of disorganization which they have reached by the opening night."[32]

Further study of the methods of publishing plays in that age only makes us marvel that we have thirty-seven plays in such complete form. Only seven-

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31 Meres, Francis, Palladis Tamia.

32 Webster, M., Shakespeare Without Tears, N. Y., 1942, p. 115.

teen were printed before the poet's death, in Quarto form. Then, in 1623, the first Folio was printed by two of his fellow actors, John Heminge, and Henry Condell. This contained twenty plays hitherto unprinted. In the preface to "the Great Variety of Readers, they say:

> It had been a thing, we confess, worthy to have been wish'd, that the author himself had lived to have set forth and overseen his own writings. But, since it hath been ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envy his friends the office of their care and pain, to have collected and publish'd them; and so to have publish'd them as where before you were abused with divers stolen and surreptitious copies, maim'd and deform'd by the frauds and stealths of injurious imposters that exposed them, even those now offer'd to your view cured and perfect of their limbs, and all the rest absolute in their numbers as he conceived them; who, as he was a happy imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it.

That Heminge and Condell were not altogether successful in offering the plays 'cured and perfect of their limbs' does not matter; their apology gives the reader some idea of the difficulties encountered in assembling the plays.

It is a recognized fact that Shakespere when new at the game fell under the spell of Marlowe's 'mighty line', and it is usually thought that the two collaborated. Certainly, if he did not collaborate, he re-wrote or re-hashed some of Marlowe's plays, and products of this collaboration or re-writing are the Henry VI plays, Parts One, Two, and Three. It is interesting to note the almost uncanny ability of Shakespere to sense accurately the vogue and taste of the time as well as of times to come. Psychologists would credit him with "extra-sensory perception", but whatever this gift was, he used it to the fullest advantage. We think of him as a mental contortionist, with his eye to the future, his ear to the ground, and his nose to the grindstone. Whatever our personal conception of the man may be, we have to admit that to write an

average of two five-act plays a year was Herculean labour. Authorities on Shakesperian criticism point out that there are many weak spots in the plays; many of the endings are either run-of-the-mill and live-happily-ever-after endings, or else an uttering of sad platitudes over the bodies of "eliminated" characters. Of the critics, those who lean towards Bardolatry say that another hand is at work, and it is not the hand of Shakespere. Others maintain that he simply became disinterested in the characters, either from his own fatigue caused by overwork, or because he had found some new plot or play to be re-worked. Perhaps, like Leonardo da Vinci, who approached each picture as a problem to be solved in painting technique, and once solved, he lost interest and left it unfinished, Shakespere may have lost interest as soon as the plot was solved. But plays, unlike paintings, had to be finished, for there was a group of actors waiting for the latest of the playwright's efforts, and so they were drawn to as neat and quickly-worked conclusion as possible. The plays - all thirty-seven of them - are there; we may read them and form our own conclusions. Although we may think that the long arm of coincidence was stretched a bit too far in As You Like It, and that the pairing-off at the end of the play was a little too neat, yet we have to be honest with ourselves - in that happy Forest of Arden we would not have it otherwise.

To return to this question of Shakespere's ability to sense acutely and accurately the vogues and tastes of the day, we see him in his earliest period of dramatic writing, dealing with chronicle history, at a time when all Englishmen were intensely interested in their record of their national achievements. King John, Richard II, Henry IV, Part One, Henry IV, Part Two, Henry V, Henry VI, Parts One, Two, and Three, and Richard III, follows English history from the signing of the Magna Carta, with gaps here and there in the

sequence (as between King John and Richard II) and some distortion of historical facts, which was and is a playwright's privilege. These plays were not, of course, written in that order, and the last of his English Chronicle History Plays Henry VIII, was written by the poet after the death of Queen Elizabeth; but by that time the vogue for historical plays had waned.

These historical plays satisfied other desires in the Elizabethan audiences. They liked pageantry, and they got it in the processions, "Enter with drums and colours" - the pomps - "Sound a sennet. Enter Richard in pomp, crown'd, Buckingham, Catesby, a Page and others."[33] Then, as now, they liked to hear the words,

> This England never did, nor never shall
> Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
> But when it first did help to wound itself.
> Now these her princes are come home again,
> Come the three corners of the world in arms,
> And we shall shock them; naught shall make us rue,
> If England to itself do rest but true. 34

In 1594 the plague had subsided sufficiently to allow the re-opening of the playhouses, and from that year to the time of his retirement, Shakespere was associated with the Lord Chamberlain's Men, who later became the King's Men. This company was headed by the Burbages, James Burbage, the father, Richard and Cuthbert, his sons, the former being the leading tragedian, and the lattersucceeding to his father's position as theatrical proprietor. The Chamberlain's Men were favoured by the Court, and in December, 1594, they gave two performances before the Queen; Burbage, Kempe, and Shakespere are mentioned in Court records as being the foremost actors.[35]

With the fortunes of the Chamberlain's Men, Shakespere's own flourished.

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33 Richard III, Act IV, Scene Two.

34 King John, Act V, Scene seven, line 112.

35 Spencer, Hazleton, p. 36.

Whether he started at the very lowest rung in their particular ladder, we don't know; but by 1594 he is mentioned as one of their leading actors; by 1598, in Francis Meres' account he is hailed as the leading playwright of the day, and in 1599, he was one of the seven shareholders in this most prosperous company. Over that period of time, the Chamberlain's Men had acquired a much finer playhouse, the Globe, on the south bank of the Thames, in a district known as the Bankside. In 1608, the Burbages, who had hitherto leased their property, Blackfriars, to a company of child players (bitter rivals of the adult companies) took over the premises for the use of their own company, and made a private theatre out of it. It became the winter quarters of the Chamberlain's, now the King's Men.

Meanwhile, life went on at Stratford, and if Shakespere was prospering, his father was not. His appeal for the granting of a coat of arms in 1596 had been set aside, and not until 1599 was this granted, when the Earl of Essex, friend of Shakespere's patron, the Earl of Southampton was chief of the Herlad's College.[36] Then in 1597 "the poet had taken openly in his own person a more effective way of rehabilitating himself and his family in the eyes of his fellow townsmen."[37] He purchased the largest house in town, known as "The New Place" at which he settled in 1611. His financial position after 1594 was secure; Chambers estimates that "Shakespere drew from the Globe Theatre, at the lowest estimate, more than 500 pounds a year in all." - the "in all" referring to his actor's salary of 180 pounds plus the income he re-

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36 Lee, Sydney, pp.187-193.

37 Ibid., p. 201.

received as a sharer in Burbage's company.

As his fortunes flourished, so did his art, and in the years 1599 to 1601 were written his superb comedies, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night, as well as one tragedy, Julius Caesar. In 1602 appeared the first version of Shakespere's Hamlet; it is referred to as "Shakespere's Hamlet" because there had been other versions of this play of the Prince of Denmark, and the poet had simply reworked an old theme. Two years later the Second Quarto of the manuscript was published as "The Tragical History of Hamlet Prince of Denmark, by William Shakespeare, newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much again as it was, according to the true and perfect copie".[38] In those intervening two years great events had occurred: on March 26, 1603, Queen Elizabeth had died. The hands that had held so tightly the reins of government had loosed their hold, not only of empire, but of Life itself.

Shakespere and his company had lost a valuable patroness; only seven weeks before her death they had entertained the Queen at Richmond. In Elizabeth's successor, James I, however, they found a far more rewarding patron, for on May 19, he granted to the Lord Chamberlain's company the royal license to

> authorise theise our Servauntes Lawrence fletcher William Shakespeare Richard Burbage Augustyne Phillippes Iohn heninges henri Condell William Sly Robert Armyn Richard Cowly and the rest of theire Assosiates freely to vse and exercise the faculty of playtinge Comedies Tragedies histories Enterludes moralls pastoralls Stageplaies and Suche others like as theie haue already studied or hereafter shall vse or studie as well for the recreation of our lovinge Subjectes as for our Solace and pleasure when wee shall thincke good to see them duringe our pleasure. [39]

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38 Ibid., p. 223.

39 Spencer, Hazleton, p. 66. Mr. Spencer makes a note of the source of this piece as the Master of the Revels' accounts and records.

As members of the King's Men, they were entitled to wear his livery since after 1604 they were made Grooms of the Chamber with only nominal duties in that capacity. As actors, they made regular court appearances, for the king "thought good to see them" and rewarded them far more handsomely on these occasions than Good Queen Bess had done.

To the next period in Shakespere's life belong his great tragedies, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus as well as the Gloomy Comedies, All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure and one play that defies classification, Timon of Athens. Scholars have attempted again and again to find some link between the events of his personal life at this time and the theme and mood of these plays. Their conclusions are equalled in diversity only by the diversity of the types, moods, and treatment of the characters in these same plays. Undoubtedly he had undergone sorrow: some years before, in 1596, his only son, Hamnet, had died. In 1601 his father had died. The sonnets, published in 1609, certainly reflect personal suffering, but of the nature or the cause of it, we can't be sure. It could have been, too, that the health of the poet was not of the best. Whatever the cause or reasons of this 'plumbing of the depths', he did it very thoroughly, and emerged with a whole mind and a full heart. These plays include A Winter's Tale, Cymbeline, and The Tempest, and Pericles.

The last record of Shakespere's appearance as an actor was in 1603 when he played in Jonson's Sejanus; the latest record of Shakespere as an active member of the King's Men is in the year 1612-1613. Neither of these dates, however, marks an end of these activities; they are simply the latest records of them. It is assumed that he retired to the New Place in Stratford in the year 1611 but there is evidence also that he was again in London after

that time, specifically, in 1613 to make the last purchase of property - a house near the Blackfriars theatre.

Whether he was in London or not, whether he wrote The Tempest in the study of the New Place or perched on a nail keg backstage in London is not important; what is important is that he wrote it. And there were two more plays, or parts of plays to be written: King Henry the Eighth, and another dramatic romance, Two Noble Kinsmen. Both of these are products of collaboration with John Fletcher, a rising playwright. The former play is generally accepted by scholars as part of the Shakesperian canon; the latter is the source of much dispute.

The record is almost complete. To it there may be added a few domestic incidents, and then on March 25, 1616, he signed his will, which had been drafted first in January of that year. Less than a month later, on April 23, 1616, he died at the age of fifty-two. His body was buried two days later in the chancel of the Stratford Church, from which place it was never moved - even to Westminster Abbey. Englishmen, while priding themselves on their phlegmatic common sense, are never quick to defy the request of a dead or dying Englishman, particularly of such a distinguished Englishman as William Shakespere. And so the grave stands untouched, and over it the inscription:

> Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbeare
> To dig the dust enclosed here;
> Bleste be the man that spares these stones,
> And curst be he that moves my bones. 40

It was the "curst be he" that stopped them; otherwise he would be lodged in the Abbey that houses the remains of England's great, and William Basse's

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40 See, Sir Sydney, p. 272.

exhortation would have had some effect.[41] It matters not whether Shakespere actually wrote those words; their inscription over his grave has provided a fitting dramatic touch, a piece of "good theatre" for the closing scene of the final act of the poet's life.

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41 Spencer, Hazleton, p. 83.
Spencer quotes this from Basse's elegy to Shakespeare:

> Renowned Spenser, lye a thought more nye
> To learned Chaucer, and rare Beaumont lye
> A little nearer Spenser to make roome
> For Shakespeare.

and points out that lines 19-21 in Jonson's famous elegy are in reference to the lines quoted here. Jonson:

> My Shakespeare, rise! I would not lodge thee by
> Chaucer or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie
> A little further to make thee a room
> Thou art a monument without a tomb.

CHAPTER TWO

The Globe Production of *Hamlet*

> The theatre does not exist for the sake of the dramatist; the dramatist exists only by virtue of, and by will of the theatre. A printed text of *Hamlet* is only partly alive. It does not assume its full existence until a body of actors in a theatre interpret the words written down on the printed page to an assembled audience....A dramatist lives not alone, as a poet does, and Shakespeare, one imagines, would have been the first to endorse this statement. 1

We are inclined to agree with Allardyce Nicoll. *Hamlet* makes fascinating reading. At best this is, however, a second-hand acquaintance, and Hamlet is a 'friend of a friend' about whom we have heard much, but have never met. It is when we meet him on the stage that we make that friendship real, and Hamlet, both the character and the play, is wholly alive.

Before launching into a description of the stage on which Hamlet came alive in Shakespere's day, it is necessary to understand the audience that filled his theatre and it is therefore necessary to attempt to describe the complexities and the simplicities, the freedom and the restrictions, the turbulence and the tranquility that made up the paradox known as the Elizabethan Age. The Elizabethans were unique in the history of a people. It was an age typified by curiosity and vitality, and, like two chemicals in a beaker, the two blended (one could almost say 'exploded') and re-acted on each other to bring about far-reaching results in almost every field of endeavour. It was this curiosity, intellectual, spiritual, and geographical, which found expression in great voyages of discovery, voyages that were made possible by the instruments of navigation whose invention was the result of

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1 Nicoll, Allardyce, *The English Theatre*, p. 191.

that same trait. But the voyages of discovery were not only geographical; the physical bravery of Hawkins, Raleigh, and Drake was equalled by the intellectual daring of Harvey, Bacon in voyaging into unknown lands of science and philosophy.

This curiosity manifested itself in the interest of Elizabethans in history. The heritage of culture left by the Greeks and the Romans was eagerly explored - it stirred their minds; but the past as well as the present and future fired their souls. It was not just an academic interest which they held, but the warm-blooded, emotional interest of Englishmen in deeds which their ancestors had done, in the trials which had beset them, and the triumphs which they had shared. In short, the Englishment were discovering patriotism. In writing his historical plays, of which the hero is not simply one particular character, but England itself, Shakespere was simply putting into poetic form the feeling of the age. Never before had Englishmen been so aware of themselves as Englishmen.

Contemporary events, too, were conspiring to accentuate the Englishman's awareness of his heritage. Philip II of Spain had recognized a worthy adversary in England sometime before he built the Armadam that was intended to destroy the island's greatness. Bands of Englishmen had played a courageous, although lucrative part in the struggle of the Netherlands and the French against Philip's oppressive rule. As a result, England challenged Spain's power on the seas as well as her drive towards the goal of a Spanish Empire. England was threatened with invasion, and although Drake may have bowled with supreme nonchalance before his encounter with the "Invincible Armada", his attitude was not necessarily shared by the people. It was the destruction of Philip's great fleet that sent the flame of English patriotism and nationalistic

feeling shooting high for all the world to see.

At the same time, there was trouble with Scotland and with Ireland. If the Thistle, the Shamrock, and the Rose were entwined, it was not lovingly. There was trouble, too, with the Pope, while the growing power of the Puritans split the religious question still further. Another grave cause for anxiety was the prevalence of the bubonic plague, the scourge of Europe for generations. Annually it raged, and annually it reaped an immense harvest of English lives. Finally, there was a new movement afoot, a rearrangement of the social framework of England. The middle class was coming into its own. The newly opened lanes of traffic on the high seas had launched England into the race for colonial power, and it was the middle class which planted the roots of commercialism and capitalism firmly in English soil and ultimately made England the leading commercial power of the world.

All these factors contributed to the forming of the Elizabethan temperament, a temperament which was far removed from that of contemporary European nations. In Renaissance Italy, the plastic arts of painting, sculpture and architecture had outstripped the sister art of literature, and Ariosto pales beside Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo. Painting had been the chief flower of the Northern Renaissance, too, and the Felmish and Dutch painters such as Breughel, Hals, and Rembrandt had laid firm hold on immortality. One, Holbein, had painted for the English court; but there were no truly English painters to rival the Northern or the Southern Renaissance artists. It was typical of the Elizabethans that they chose the more virile mode of dramatic literature for their art. It was words which fascinated them - words written, spoken, sung, or declaimed to the skies - and so it is not surprising that the man who painted with words was held in higher esteem than the man who painted with brushes and oils. Of these, Shakespere's name is the most

renowned. Yet, without his name, the Elizabethan Age would hold its own with any other in English literature.

There was another characteristic of the Elizabethans which was in reality an outcropping of their intellectual curiosity. This was versatility. Here the age is in distinct contrast to our own age which, in respect to arts and sciences, we call an age of specialism. The average Elizabethan courtier was as adept at penning a well-turned phrase as he was capable of appreciating it. Raleigh, Spenser, Sidney and Bacon earned their reputations in fields other than that of literature, but they made outstanding contributions to it and they are only a few of an amazingly long list. Their versatility was not that of a dilettante; in each of their undertakings they exhibited uncommon ability, and realized uncommon success.

"Life, Crichton", said Sir James Barrie,"is like a cup of tea. The faster we drink it, the sooner we reach the dregs." The Elizabethans reached the dregs sooner, on the average, than we do today - a man of fity was old. It was a free-and-easy world in which men had given up their forefathers' habit of worrying about the hereafter. They lived lustily and adventurously, and were proud if they died "with their boots on" - preferably their sea boots. Such a mode of living usually does not make for delicacy of taste. In the public playhouses, the audiences were composed mainly of men (only women of more fame than fortune attended) and they had only contempt for ladylike terms. They called a spade a spade,and if there was mud on it, they liked it all the better. Paradoxically, there existed in this audience a keen appreciation of the refinements of life in that age. A man could turn from a loose oath to a pretty compliment, and there was no incongruity in it, nor

inconsistency in his make-up. Sir Philip Sidney, one of England's beloved seagoing heroes, was a two-fisted adventurer. In between his piratical voyages he could pen "A Sonnet to His Mistress' Eyebrow"- or to Stella - and these lovely and lyrical compositions would never for an instant suggest to his contemporaries that he was "sissy". This appreciation of delicacy and lyricism, too, was bound up in the Elizabethan love of poetry and music. "It was no accident that Shakespere's plays were more poetry than prose", writes G. M. Trevelyan. "Here then, were gathered together several classes of society, differing from one another more or less in tastes and education. It was Shakespere's business to please them all".

> Yet after all, it was this motley public, more composite and representative than any public has been since, which, despite its ill-judgment and conflict of opinion, inspired all that is greatest in our drama...It is the glory of Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, that they were sat in judgment upon by a common jury in an open court. 2

For they were "sat in judgment upon", and the audience left no doubt in the minds of the actors and playwright as to whether they liked what they saw and heard on the stage of the Globe theatre. They had two ways of showing their disapproval: they could be openly vociferous about it, or they could deal the more subtle blow by turning to dice or cards, or perhaps eating noisily of the fruit or nuts which they had purchased from the vendors.

From time to time, some author attempts to prove or disprove that Shakespere believed in ghosts, spirits and witches. The reader of such books is rewarded mainly with the conviction that the author does believe

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2 Lawrence, W. J., Old Theatre Days and Ways. London: 1935, p. 43.

in ghosts, whether Shakespere did or not. The sum of this observation is this: we cannot say whether or not the poet believed in ghosts, and possibly he would not have been able to answer yes or no, were the question put to him. We do know however, that by incorporating them in his plays, the seeds of his ideas of the supernatural were falling on fertile ground. Stories, plays, pamphlets, and old wives' tales of the period abound in supernatural elements. Perhaps the moors and fenns, the mists that shroud them, and the winds that howl across the land helped to foster the belief. Certainly, in that day, and even up to the eighteenth century, women were persecuted and put to death on charges of witchcraft. Ghosts were not punishable. First of all, they were not,as witches were, servants of the devil. Secondly, they could not be caught no matter whom or what they served. Hamlet makes this distinction when he says:

> The spirit I have seen
> May be the devil: and the devil has power
> T' assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
> Out of my weakness and my melancholy
> As he is very potent with such spirits,
> Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds
> more relative than this. 3

Hamlet knows he has seen a spirit; but whether this "perturbed spirit" is his father's, or the devil in a pleasing shape, he is not sure.

In Julius Caesar there is a speech of Calpurnia's which must have struck awe into Elizabethan hearts:

> And graves have yawned and yielded up their dead;
> Fierce fiery warriors fight upon the clouds
> In ranks and squadrons and right form of war,
> Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol;
> Horses did neigh and dying men did groan;
> And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets.
> O Caesar, these things are beyond all use
> And I do fear them!

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3 Hamlet (I-ii).

4 Julius Caesar (II-ii).

It is safe to say that the Elizabethans not only feared them, but believed in them too.

Of this curious mixture of noblemen and tradesmen's apprentices, scholars and fops, those who loved the theatre, and those who were "for a jig or a tale of bawdry", of sailors, soldiers, and visiting countrymen, Shakespere has something to say in Hamlet. He makes a careful distinction between the "judicious" and the "unskilful". The judgment of one of the former, he says, must count for more than the judgment of a whole theatre of the latter. But he was not unaware of the power of the "unskilful" in deciding what was to be popular on his stage.

> I heard thee speak me a speech once - but it was never acted; or, if it was, not above once; for the play, I remember, pleased not the million; 'twas caviar to the general: but it was - as I received it, and others, whose judgments in such matters cried the top in mine - an excellent play, well digested in the scenes set down with as much modesty as cunning. 5

We can't help wondering how those who crowded the pit of the Globe to watch Hamlet received the dictum of the Prince that the groundlings were, "for the most part, capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise".

To justify Shakespere's opinion of the groundlings, it must be remembered that the majority of them were illiterate. In those days there were no newspapers, magazines or novels, and even if these had existed, few could have read them. So the Elizabethans went to the public playhouse to be informed as well as entertained. It was another means of satisfying the tremendous curiousity that characterized their age. But no matter how informative the play was, it would not "go down" unless it had a story - a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. "They expected to have the persons introduced, and

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5 Hamlet, II-ii.

after two hours of vicissitude to be finally disposed of - married or buried"[6] In Hamlet they were not disappointed; there were no marriages but nine were buried.[7]

The court of Queen Elizabeth was the center of English politics, religion, art and intrigue. As Professor Dover Wilson puts it, it was "the keystone of national life". It had been the function of English monarchs, and particularly of the Tudor monarchs, to sponsor the arts; Henry VIII had set a precedent which his daughter not only followed, but surpassed. The whole national and patriotic feeling of Englishmen was centered in and symbolized by their Queen. It was only fitting that she should do so, for in her the many characteristics of the English Renaissance met and fused. The intellectual curiosity mentioned above resulted in her being a considerable scholar in her own right. She had the same love of pageantry and spectacle as her people; witness the triumphal tours she made at regular intervals and at great expense to the exchequer.[8] Her patronage was not bountiful as far as financial remuneration was concerned, but her acceptance of this or that composer, artist, or writer was worth more than the money she paid - or "forgot" to pay. Her love of the theatre was real, and plays were presented regularly at court. It was this patronage of the drama which provided the link between her and the theatre of Shakespere and his fellows. Although she did not visit the Globe playhouse to see his plays, she decreed that he and his company should come to the court to present them, and the Globe's company became the most favoured group of professional actors at court,

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6 Thorndike, A. H., Shakespeare's Theatre, New York: 1916, p. 417.

7 If you can count the ghost.

8 Simonson, Lee, The Stage is Set, New York: 1932, p. 233.

as they were the most popular company with the "motley public".

One of the chief rivals of the Globe company was the Lord Admiral's Men who were managed by Philip Henslowe and whose playhouse was the Fortune. He had been an interested spectator when the Burbages and their friends had literally taken things into their own hands by moving the timbers of the Theatre, their erstwhile playhouse, across the river to the bank side, and there erecting the Globe. The popularity of this playhouse and its company led Henslowe to commission Peter Street, carpenter, in January 1599 to build a playhouse to be called the Fortune, "in all contrivations, conveyances, fashions, thinge and thinges effected, finished and doen according to the manner and fashion of the saide howse called the Globe".[9] It is fortunate for posterity that Henslowe considered the Globe worth copying, for the only accurate data on the dimensions and construction of it are to be found in the building contract of the Fortune.

> The frame of the saide house to be sett square, and to conteine fowerscore foote of lawful assize everye waie square without and fiftie five foote of like assize square everye waie within, with a good suer and stronge foundacion of pyles, brick, lyme and sand, both without and within...and the saide frame to conteine three stories in heighth, the first of lower storie to conteine twelve foote of lawful assize in heighth, the second storie eleavon foote of lawful assize in heighth, and the third or upper storie to conteine nine foote of lawful assize in heighth...and such like steares, conveyances, and divisions without and within, as are made and contryved in and to the late-erected play-house on the Bancke in the saide parish of St. Saviours, called the Globe; with a stadge and tyreinge-house to be made, erected and sett up within the saide frame; with a shadow or cover over the saide stadge...and which stadge shall conteine in length fortie and three foote of lawful assize, and in breadth to extende to the middle of the yarde of the saide house; the same stadge to be

> paled in belowe with good stronge and sufficyent newe oken bourdes...and the sadie stadge to be in all other proporcions contrived and fashioned like unto the stadge of the saide playhouse called the Globe; with conveient windows and lights glazed to the saide tyring-house. 10

For this work, the worthy Peter Street was to receive the sum of "fower hundred and fortie poundes of lawfull moneye of Englande". One can imagine him sitting through performance after performance at the Globe, surreptiously making measurements, and jotting down, "Heighth of the stadge: fower foote, Heighth of lower storie, twelve foote," while Burbage thundered,

> It is a damned ghost that we have seen;
> And my imaginations are as foul
> As Vulcan's stithy.

Despite the existence of Henslowe's careful record, there are as many different theories on the construction of the Elizabethan playhouses as there are books devoted to the subject. The truth of the matter is that no one can establish facts; the only contemporary drawing is of the Swan Theatre, and has obvious inaccuracies. "If only(Inigo) Jones, who drew so well and understood so thoroughly, had taken his sketchbook to the public theatre."[11] Jones was too busy designing costumes and sets for court masques and the crude "de Witt" drawing remains the only one of the Elizabethan playhouse, The Swan.[12]

Sheldon Cheney aptly called the Elizabethan playhouse a "doughnut" structure. Using that picturesque term, the "hole" of the doughnut was approximately fifty-five feet square (or round, or hexagonal) and this was the pit or yard. The part surrounding the "hole" was composed of three galleries, the first twelve feet in height, the second, eleven feet, and the top, nine feet. Above

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10 Halliwell, Phillips, Outlines, London, 1883, II p. 305.

11 Stevens, T. W., The Theatre from Athens to Broadway, p. 93.

12 See Thorndike, A. H., p. 50 ff.

the stage, crowning the top gallery was a turret from which a flag flew on a day that a performance was to be given. Here too, the trumpet blast announcing the beginning of the play was blown.

The stage was a wooden platform three or four feet above the ground and paled in with "oken bourdes". This platform was some forty-three feet wide and jutted approximately twenty-seven feet into the yard which was without permanent seating arrangements. Here, surrounding the three open sides of the platform the groundlings stood. The depth of the stage was broken a third or a half of the way back by two large pillars. These pillars supported a slanting thatched roof which projected over the stage and was known as "the heavens". It was attached at the height of the third balcony and served as a sounding board for the actors as well as protection for them. The heavens may have derived their name from the use made of them - they concealed the throne or "state" which was lowered to the stage by mechanism housed in the turret or hut. Jove's thunderbolt in Cymbeline was lowered in this way. The throne of Claudius, and Gertrude may have been set by the same manner. Such practices prompt Lee Simonson to declare rather wearily:

> Gods and godesses descend with monotonous regularity...The throne on which a god was let down seems to have been almost as necessary a part of Elizabethan stage equipment as an elevator in present day office buildings. 13

Another device for stage effects was the stage trap, a heritage left by the Miracle and Morality Plays in which dragons, devils and fire-eating monsters rose out of the stage floor with a regularity that may or may not have been monotonous. There were perhaps four or five of these traps in the Globe stage platform, the use of which Shakespere and his contemporaries had

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13 Simonson, Lee, p. 220.

refined somewhat.[14] Effective use is made of them in the appearances and disappearances of the ghost in Hamlet. What a thrill for the audience to see the ghost of Hamlet's father rise slowly and majestically! What a painful and exhausting moment for the two sweating stage hands below stage who hauled the ropes that raised the platform!

Behind the outer stage, and separated from it by curtains, which could be drawn or opened at will, was the inner stage or recess. This was approximately twenty-three feet wide and ten to twelve feet deep. It was presumably a passageway open at each end, and lighted at the back by glazed windows. Here a few simple properties could be set behind closed curtains. In The Tempest, part way through the first scene of the last act, the stage directions read: "Here Prospero discovers Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess". The term, "discovered", was a conventional one, used for indicating the opening of the recess curtains, and the switching of the action from the outer to the inner stage. The recess was used for indoor and chamber scenes, and in such special instances as the cave in Cymbeline, Prospero's cell in the Tempest and the tomb in Romeo and Juliet.

To the left and right of the recess were two doors opening on the outer stage, and either flush with the line of the recess opening, or (and what is more desirable and if not more probable) placed obliquely or at right angles to that line. Back stage, to the right and left of the recess were the tiring rooms where costumes and properties were stored and changed, and where the company awaited their cues.

Above the recess, and reached by stairs rising from the tiring rooms, was the gallery or balcony which was really a continuation of the second gallery

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[14] See A. J. Lawrence, Pre-Restoration Stage Studies, Cambridge, 1927, ch. VII.

of the playhouse. It was used for several purposes, the most important of which was a third acting area or platea. It served equally well as Juliet's chamber, as the walls of Harfleur[15] or as a monument in Antony Cleopatra. All these the balcony became without benefit of properties; in every case the stage directions read, "Enter aloft", or "Enter above".

A second use made of the balcony was the housing of musicians whose services were regularly required in Elizabethan productions. The third use was made of this space by playgoers who could afford to pay the extra price. After 1600, the stage itself supplanted the gallery as the favoured place for young gallants to sit. It was apparently the aim of these dandies to be seen, rather than see, and to be heard, rather than hear. Thomas Dekker's Gull's Hornbook gives us a first-hand view of these young gentlemen who sat on three-legged stools around the stage platform. Another contemporary writer, Thomas Platter of Basle who visited England in 1599 records that it was the fashion of these playgoers to create as much disturbance as possible. "They sit dispersed, making faces and spitting, wagging their upright ears, and cry, 'Filthy, filthy'". One can imagine Richard Burbage as Hamlet wishing fervently that this too, too solid flesh would melt!

The actor belonging to the acting company of the Globe - or to any of the Elizabethan companies - had a far more real bond with the production of the plays in which he acted than does his average counterpart today.

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15 Henry V, Act III.

First of all, he was a member of a compact group, sharing their aims and achievements; his success or failure was identified with theirs. Secondly, his income depended on his status in the company - a status which was determined not only by his dramatic ability, but by his length of service to that company. He might either have joined as a boy actor, playing women's parts, or else as a stage hand or bit player, rising from the ranks to play larger parts. If he had outstanding dramatic ability, he might become a leading actor. It is thought that Shakespere followed this procedure, starting as a bit player, but turned from acting to playwrighting after he had attained the exalted position of leading actor.[16] With the Burbages' company, a system obtained whereby the leading actors were made shareholders in the company, and received a certain share of the profits rather than a straight salary. A further step in this direction was taken by the Burbages who made five of their leading actors, including Shakespere, "Housekeepers", allotting to them part ownership of the Globe building and later of the Blackfriars theatre.[17]

It is not too much to presume that this close tie between the actor and his company had a marked effect on his acting, as well as on his attitude towards it. He was not just an individual intent on proving his dramatic powers to the audience; he was also a member of a team, a part of an integrated whole. This team spirit characterized the Elizabethan acting companies, and any member of the group who might not share it, or who refused to identify himself with the common ideals of the company would be in

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16 Chambers, E. K., William Shakespeare. p. 73.

17 Baldwin, T. W., The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearian Company: "The chief actors of the Shakespearian company had become housekeepers, first at the Globe, and then at Blackfriars, by way of investment, the process having been medicated by their common membership with Richard Burbage." p. 115.

danger of hearing the words, "I pray you, reform it altogether" from his fellow actors. The alternative, one presumes, would be dismissal from the company.

In Shakespere's day, women did not appear on the English public stage. Their parts were played by young boys who served a kind of apprenticeship to the acting companies. Chambers suggests that they were bound by private agreement "to individual sharers who undertook to give them training" for a period of perhaps three years.[18] If, at the end of that time they became regular members of the company, they must have been thoroughly versed in the technique of acting as well as in the scripts of the plays themselves. Contemporary accounts credit these lads with skilful and effective acting. One, Salathial Pavy, who died at the age of thirteen, was eulogized by Ben Jonson. Margaret Webster remarks of them: "They must have given performances which fully encompassed the glorious parts which Shakespere wrote for them. They were, as he was, dedicated to the theatre. We should not make the mistake of appraising them as schoolboys forced self-consciously into long skirts."[19] But the most significant tribute to the skill of the boys at playing women's parts is to be found in a comment of Coryat, who, when he first saw women on the Italian stage, said, "They performed it with as good a grace...as ever I saw any masculine actor."[20]

It is obvious that the convention of boy actors playing women's parts affected Shakespere's treatment of his female characters. They are rarely given speeches of any length, and their characters are portrayed more through the speeches of the men in the plays than by their own words or actions. Scenes of intimacy between men and women characters are usually only referred to or suggested; to put it colloquially, there were few "clinches". Another

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18 Chambers, E. K. William Shakespeare, p. 79.

19 Webster, M. Shakespeare Without Tears, p. 100.

20 Quoted by Allardyce Nicoll in The English Theatre, p. 65.

effect of this convention is to be found in the prevalence of scenes in which a woman masquerades as a boy or man. Rosalind becomes Ganymede, Viola, Caesario; Portia is the young doctor of laws, and Imogen is, appropriately enough, Fidele. This practice doubtless afforded greater freedom to the boy actors who played the parts.

If, while writing Hamlet, Shakespere kept in mind that it would be young boys who were to play the parts of Ophelia and Gertrude, then he also bore in mind that Richard Burbage was to play the title role. Since the playwright was associated with the same company for twenty years, it is understandable that he should draw many of his parts with certain players in mind. He did not make the mistake, however, of tying his conception of the character to an actor of a certain type, but rather to an actor of certain abilities; therein lies the timelessness of his characterizations. At the same time, the audience must have become well-acquainted with the members of the various companies, and, "Each member of the cast would be as familiar to the spectators as the individuals of a local football team are to-day to a crowd on the home ground."[21]

The versatility that was a characteristic of the age was also displayed by the Elizabethan actor - "and one man in his time plays many parts." Doubling was a necessary practice; the actor who played Polonius in Acts I, II, and III, of Hamlet, might be called upon to play the first gravedigger in Act V, Scene one. In this play, the total number of characters listed in the dramatis personae is thirty, not counting the "lords, ladies, officers, soldiers, sailors, messengers, and other attendants". Divide these among a group of

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21 Wilson, Dover, The Essential Shakespeare, p. 30.

"twenty-six principal actors" and it is readily seen what an important part doubling played in the Elizabethan production of Hamlet. [22]

The actors had to know not only a variety of parts in one play, but a variety of plays per season. A play did not have a "run"; instead, the bill was changed daily, and the actors had to learn a brand new play once in a fortnight. Some idea of the difficulties encountered by this practice is found in the prologue to The Return from Parnasus:

> Stagekeeper: Thou must be sitting up all night at cards when thou shouldst be conning thy part.
>
> Boy actor: It's all along on you; I could not get my part a night or two before, that I might sleep on it. [23]

Again, in the Prologue to Wily Beguiled, the Stagekeeper speaks:

> What ho! Where are these paltry players? Still pouring on their papers and never perfect? For shame, come forth; their eyes dim with expectation. [24]

Our sympathy is as much with the paltry players as with the audience standing in the pit and awaiting the opening lines of the play.

The actors were versatile in yet another way; many of them were singers, dancers, acrobats and skilled swordsmen. Some may have been all of these; certainly, all were some of these. Hamlet requires the leading actor to exhibit expert swordsmanship; some of the Players in the Mousetrap scene play various wind instruments; Ophelia sings, as does the first gravedigger, and perhaps the ghost accomplishes a sudden disappearance by an acrobatic leap into an open stage trap. [25] Of the players

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22 There is some disagreement as to how many members comprised Shakespere's company. (See The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearian Company by T.W. Baldwin). The playbill of the Evans-Webster production of Hamlet in 1939 lists 27 actors in dramatis personae. One actor played four separate parts, so the practice has by no means waned.

23 Dodsley's Old English Plays, London, 1874, Vol. IX, p. 101.

24 Ibid, p. 22.

25 Lawrence, W.J. Pre-Restoration Stage Studies, Ch. VII

listed in Shakespere's company, one, Will Kempe, was renowned as a dancer, Augustine Phillips was a musician, and in his will lists many musical instruments which were to be left to fellow-members of his profession.

It is not known who directed the production of the plays, but it seems logical that Shakespere directed many of his own. It is significant that there is a sad lack of stage directions accompanying most of his earlier plays, and the writing of much fuller directions for later plays such as The Tempest, and Henry VIII which are thought to have been written after he retired to the New Place in Stratford.[26] It does not seem likely that a man whose knowledge of stagecraft was so sure would be apt to stand by and let others instruct the actors in his plays. Margaret Webster, in Shakespeare Without Tears writes,

> The standard requirements of a good actor have, however never been more succinctly put than by Shakespere himself in Hamlet's famous speeches to the Players.[27]

It was the custom for the stagekeeper to hand out the parts, and perhaps read them to any unable to do so for themselves. Rehearsals were probably held in the morning since the performances were in the afternoon. Johannes Rhenanus, a little-known German writer has this to say in 1613:

> So far as actors are concerned, they, as I noticed in England, are daily instructed as it were in a school, so that even the most eminent actors have to allow themselves to be instructed by the Dramatists which arrangement gives life and ornament to

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26 Wilson, Dover, The New Shakespere, The Tempest (1921) p. 80.

27 Webster, M. Shakespeare Without Tears, p. 76.

> a well-written play, so that it is no wonder that the English players (I speak of the skilled ones) surpass and have the advantage of others. [28]

We know that Ben Jonson directed his own plays; it is safe to presume that Shakespere did so too.

In discussing Elizabethan acting, one point must be kept clearly in mind, and that is the intimacy that existed between actors and audience -- an intimacy afforded by the physical construction of the stage itself. "Hamlet," says Allardyce Nicoll, "was not a being in black posturing behind artificial footlights; he was an Elizabethan gentleman who might, in happier circumstances, have been seated on the stool occupied by this or that young gallant." [29] It was a reciprocal arrangement that existed between actor and audience, and the response of the latter to the actor's words was a far more tangible thing than that allowed by our modern stage convention of acting behind a barrier of footlights. By this same token, the soliloquy and the aside were more reasonable pieces of dramatic utterance than they are to-day.

The member of parliament reserves certain gestures and tone of voice for his address in the town hall. For his out-of-door meetings, he has a different technique. Similarly, the Elizabethan actor used a method of delivery suiting the open-air theatre in which he acted. It must be remembered that there were no acoustical devices in the Globe or in any of the public playhouses; indeed, they were even without roofs. This meant that the lines had to be delivered with emphasis and vigour, rather than subtlety and restraint. Evidently some of

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28 Quoted by W.J. Lawrence, Old Theatre Days and Ways, p. 53.

29 Nicoll, Allardyce, The English Theatre, p. 46.

Shakespere's acting contemporaries were over-zealous in this respect, which led him to deplore the tendency to "tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings." But he goes on to say: "Be not too tame, neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor." The implication is that, unfortunately, not all Elizabethan actors were endowed with sufficient discretion. Obviously Shakespere is critical of many of the dramatic practices, or malpractices, of his day, and not the least of these is the strutting and bellowing which amounts to the type of acting which today we call "ham".

Certain scholars * maintain that conventional gestures were used by the actors to denote sorrow, happiness, and other moods. For example, the tragic mood would be indicated by the wringing of hands, tearing of hair, or writhing on the floor. "Is it not monstrous" cries Hamlet,

> that this player here
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> could force his soul so to his own conceit
> that, from her working, all his visage wann'd;
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!
> For Hecuba!
> What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba,
> That he should weep for her? [30]

Later, in the Mousetrap scene, he refers to the Player's "damnable faces". Such actions may have been accepted stage practice, but we are not entirely sure that Shakespere approved of it, for he says: "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for anything so overdone

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[30] Hamlet, IV - ii.

* For one, Allardyce Nicoll.

is from the purpose of playing."

Finally, the Elizabethans were trained to appreciate the spoken word. They were the heirs of Marlowe's "high astounding terms", and the pretty conceits of Lyly. They enjoyed not just the intellectual quality of these words, but the musical and rhythmic quality as well. Music was a part of the warp and woof of Elizabethan life. It was so with Elizabeth at the top of the scale; it was so with the lowliest tanner's apprentice at the opposite end of the scale. And since their ears were tuned to it, its beauty was not lost on them. This means that speeches could be delivered at a much faster tempo and still be understood. It is generally conceded that a faster speed of delivery than that which we use today was necessary to allow the production to be given in its accustomed two or two and a half hours.

The actor in Shakespere's day who took part in his Hamlet used a different set of conventions and played to a different type of audience than does our modern actor. But his purpose, then as now, was to tell his story, movingly andeffectively. Said Hamlet, "The players cannot keep counsel: they'll tell all." [31]

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The physical features of the Globe playhouse have already been described, and now it remains to show what use was made of them by the members of its company in producing Hamlet. The system of having three platea or acting areas is one of the most characteristic features of the

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31 Hamlet, III - ii.

Elizabethan stage, and, "the use of the platform, upper stage, and inner stage was flexible in the extreme, and the imagination of the audience was freely called upon." [32] It was flexible in that the action could move from the outer to the inner, and perhaps to the upper stage all in the same scene. Or, the inner stage might be reserved for a totally different locality in the scene to follow. A.H. Thorndike bases his "Principle of Alternation" on the theory that many of Shakespere's plays (and those of his period) were written so that indoor and outdoor scenes could be alternated between the inner and outer stage, Such plays as The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, and Cymbeline he includes in this group. Hamlet offers no evidence of this principle of staging being applied. [33]

Again, the scene might open in the inner stage and move to the outer as the act progressed. In Act I, Scene 2, "a room of state in the castle", the king might be "discovered" seated on his throne surrounded by his courtiers, and the action proceed from there, to the outer stage.

It is a natural assumption that the closet scene between Hamlet and his mother was laid in the recess. "But", says Chambers, "I do not think that the alcove (recess) was used for Gertrude's closet in Hamlet, the whole of which play seems to me to be set very continuously on the outer stage." [34] He substantiates this argument by pointing out that had the scene taken place in the recess, then the popular and

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32 Nicoll, A. The English Theatre, p. 43.

33 Thorndike, A.H. p. 109 ff.

34 Chambers, E.K., The Elizabethan Stage, Oxford, 1923. Vol. III, p. 122.

necessary convention of "carrying out the body" of Polonius was superfluous; all that was needed was to close the curtains. The stage directions say: "Exeunt severally; Hamlet tugging in Polonius."

Fortunately for this study, Hamlet offers no real problems of violations of the unity of place. The entire action of the play is at Elsinore, with the single exception of Hamlet's scene with the Danish captain on "a plain in Denmark". [35] Because there was no scenery to be shifted, there was very little time lost between scenes, and a player could make his exit via the left stage door at the close of one scene and reappear almost immediately at the other. The audience knew that a new scene had begun, and that this locale was not necessarily the locale of the previous scene. For instance, Hamlet in Scene III of Act IV cries, "Come, for England!" and leaves the stage, to reappear fifteen lines further on in Scene IV at "a plain in Denmark".

In Hamlet as in all of his plays, Shakespere often used the device of a rhymed couplet to mark the close of a scene. The opening lines of the next then designated the locale once more. At the end of Scene III, Act III, the King speaks his exit line:

> My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
> Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

The third acting area, the balcony, was used more often in Shakespere's later plays, since after the turn of the seventeenth century it became more popular for the gallants to sit on the stage rather than

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35 In many of the plays, action jumps from place to place. Antony and Cleopatra, Macbeth, Othello, Julius Caesar, Pericles. In such circumstances, the actor simply carried his locality with him. So Antony might take leave of Cleopatra at Alexandria and in the next scene enter by another door at Rome. Truly "his legs bestrid the ocean" '.

above it. This freed the gallery for the actors' use, and "Enter above" is the simple stage direction accompanying action in this place. Perhaps the Ghost "enters above" in the closet scene of Act III, although the stage directions simply say "Enter Ghost." This would seem a logical place to make effective use of the balcony.

> Into a thousand parts divide one man,
> And make imaginary puissance.

So writes Shakespere in the Prologue to Henry V. The Elizabethan stage was never thronged with supernumaries; three or four men stood for a whole army. It was this practice that led Sir Philip Sydney to write rather bitterly in 1595:

> Two armies flye in, represented with foure swords and bucklers; and then what harde heart will not receive it for a pitched fielde? [36]

Shakespere, too, used this device, but perhaps with a little more finesse than that exhibited by some of his predecessors. Twice in Hamlet the "army of Norway" appears on the stage. The stage direction reads: "Enter Fortinbras with his army over the stage." Their appearance prompts Hamlet to ask,

> Good, sir, whose powers are these? and is answered,
> They are of Norway, sir. [38]

In many battle scenes of Shakespere's plays the progress of the battle is discussed in conversation between the characters. This obviates the necessity of staging combat scenes between "foure swords and bucklers." In Julius Caesar, Brutus cries:

> Oh look, Titinius, look! The villains fly! [39]

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36 Sydney, Sir Philip, An Apologie for Poetry, 1595.

38 Hamlet, Act IV, Scene 4.

39 Julius Caesar, Act V, Scene 3, line 1.

The use of stage traps in Hamlet must be emphasized. The ghost's appearances, disappearances, Ophelia's grave scene, and perhaps the setting of the arbour for the Mousetrap scene -- all were done by this device. The spine-chilling effect of the Ghost's appearance would be much enhanced if he rose majestically until finally he stands there "cap-a-pe," the image of Hamlet's father.[40] In Act I, Scene 4, he beckons Hamlet who follows him. Presumably they would leave by one of the stage doors, re-entering by the other in the following scene at "another part of the platform." But this time, the Ghost would make his disappearance via the trap, for, while Hamlet is urging Horatio and Marcellus to swear to keep silence on what they have seen, the voice of the Ghost comes from below:

Ghost: Swear.

Hamlet: Aha boy, say'st thou so? Art thou there, truepenny?
Come on! You hear this fellow in the cellarage.
Consent to swear.

Horatio: Propose the oath, my lord.

Hamlet: Never to speak of this that you have seen.
Swear by my sword.

Ghost: (beneath) Swear.

Hamlet: Hic et ubique? Then we'll shift our ground.
Come hither, gentlemen,
And lay your hands again upon my sword.
Never to speak of this that you have heard:
Swear by my sword.

Ghost: (beneath) Swear.

Hamlet: Well said, old mole! Canst work i' th' earth so fast?
A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends.[41]

40 It is recorded that Shakespere himself played this part. One stage direction for The Tempest reads: "Thunder and lightning. Enter Ariel like a harpy; claps his wings upon the table; and with a quaint device the banquet vanishes." Act III, Scene 3, line 52.

41 Hamlet, Act I, Scene 5, lines 149-163.

In Ophelia's burial scene, a large size trap must have been used; the two gravediggers stand in it; the corpse is lowered into it; Laertes leaps into the grave followed by the enraged Hamlet who grapples with him. It is to be hoped that the boy actor who played the luckless Ophelia had the opportunity of slipping off the trap platform before Hamlet and Laertes flung themselves on top of the bier. A trap may have been used to set the small stage for the play-within-a-play, and the "bank of flowers" or arbour may have appeared from below.[42] This is conjecture; or again, the players may have played the mousetrap scene within the recess.

Such "unmoveable" properties as the arbour just mentioned, as distinct from "moveable" or acting properties, were few in number. A chamber scene might be set within the recess, and for this a bed or couch would suffice. The King's state or throne, a banquet table, a bench, a tree or shrub -- any of these could have been placed by the aid of the traps. (In the last scene of Hamlet the attendants enter with a table on which stand flagons of wine.) In every case, the setting is merely suggested, and the "platea" localized by the placing of one or two simple pieces. For example, the garden of Olivia in Twelfth Night wouldbe suggested by the setting out of a box tree.[43] The imagination of the audience did the rest.

The imaginative powers of the Elizabethan audience were vast, and, as Allardyce Nicoll points out, were freely called upon. But they had one

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42 Chambers, E.K. The Elizabethan Stage, Vol. III, p. 107.

43 Twelfth Night, Act II, Scene 5.

great source of aid in the magnificent descriptive lines written by Shakespere. It is in these "atmospheric lines" that the Elizabethan stage is most beautifully set: it is in the writing of these lines that Shakespere has added immeasurably to English literature. Certainly it made the actor's part infinitely more colourful. From a practical viewpoint, such lines were necessary; they told the locality, the time of day, the kind of weather, and the season. From an aesthetic viewpoint, they succeed in painting pictures in the mind's eye -- pictures that cannot be equalled by twentieth century painted stage sets.

The action in Hamlet is localized, and the locale is easily understood, so there is little "setting of the scene" by atmospheric lines. They are, however, woven through the play.

> But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill. (I, 1)
>
> .... the dreadful summit of the cliff
> That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
> ,,,.....
> The very place puts toys of desperation,
> Without more motive, into every brain
> That looks so many fathoms to the sea
> And hears it roar beneath. (I, 4).

Hamlet describes,

> This most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this
> Brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted
> With golden fire. (II, 2).

And then there is the lovely speech of the queen,

> There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
> That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream. (IV, 7).

The Elizabethan productions were not as sparing with "moveable props" as they were with the other type. Paradoxically, the Elizabethan audience demanded some sharp details of realism in such matters as death scenes.

A contemporary document records the use of a sheep's gather from which blood was extracted.[44] A small sponge was soaked with this blood and concealed in the hand of the actor about to be wounded or killed. It was a simple matter for him to clutch his "wound," leaving the stain on his clothes or body so that the audience could plainly see it. The same realism was demanded in decapitation scenes. The stage directions in Macbeth read: "Enter Macduff with Macbeth's head." As W.J. Lawrence succinctly points out: "Heads, we know, have an ugly habit of bleeding when suddenly severed from the body."[45] Presumably the blood of the sheep's gather was freshly spattered on the false head and perhaps on the actor playing Macduff, before he made his appearance with his gruesome burden.

The more conventional type of properties were freely used; swords, rapiers, spades, goblets -- all are mentioned in the script of Hamlet. In the mousetrap scene, in addition to the bower, a crown, a vial of "poison" and gifts for the Queen are specifically mentioned. In Act II, Sc. 2, the stage direction reads, "Enter, Hamlet, reading a book." In the graveyard scene the clowns dig up several skulls; Gertrude throws flowers on Ophelia's bier, and in the Last scene of Act V, the directions are comparatively elaborate: "Enter, Osric, attendants with foils and gauntlets, a table and flagons of wine on it."

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44 Lawrence, W.J., Pre-Restoration Stage Studies, p. 237.

45 Ibid, p. 237.

In Elizabethan England, men and women dressed not so much to their taste as to their rank. For each rank there was "a ceiling on elegance"; and the miller, no matter how well turned out he was, still looked like a miller. And so, on the stage the actors dressed according to the rank of the character they played. The badges of their caste were simple; a king was a king if he wore a crown. There was, however, no attempt to make him harmonize with the age in which he had lived. Doubtless Cymbeline, Macbeth, Claudius and Henry VIII wore almost identical garments, despite the fact that their historical milieux were separated by several centuries. They were royal garments, but they were, first of all, Elizabethan garments -- "For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings." Costumes, too, helped designate the setting of the scene. If a man were bareheaded, then the scene would be indoors; if he were cloaked and hatted, then it was likely that the scene was outdoors -- a street, a plain or an entrance to a castle.

The costume wardrobe of the Globe Theater, while limited as to historical authenticity, was not necessarily limited in expenditure. Henslowe records that in 1602 he paid four pounds for a "clocke of chamlett lined with crymson tafetie, pincked" and in the same year, six pounds "for a manes gown of branshed vellvet and a doublett." [46] If the Globe company "kept up with the Joneses", then their wardrobe expenditure was not a minor one in the production of Hamlet. It would have to include, as well as the royal robes, the ghost's armour, and the armour of Fortinbras' men.

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46 Henslowe, Diary (London, 1845) p. 240.

The problem of stage lighting, all-important in modern stage production, was a minor one in Shakespere's day. The plays were presented in the afternoon; they started at two or thereabouts, so that the audience could arrive home before sunset. Since the theatre was open to the sky, daylight was the sole source of lighting for that stage. The natural question that arises is, What of the night scenes?, and this is where the Shakesperean atmospheric lines step once more into the breach.

> 'Tis now the very witching time of night
> When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes forth
> Contagion to this world. (III, 2).

That was a dark enough night for the Elizabethan audience.

The changing of darkness to light was done in the same way. The Ghost speaks:

> The glowworm shows the matin to be near
> And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire. (I, 5).

Once device used to set the time was the bringing in of torches. We know even before the opening words of the Mousetrap scene are spoken that it takes place at night.

> Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, other lords and attendants with the Guard carrying torches. (III, 2).

Yet another devide for setting the time is the use of sound effects. The crowing of the cock in Act I, scene 1, tells the audience more effectively than words that the scene takes place in the darkness before dawn. Most of these sound effects originated in the garret or hut which contained a device to produce the noise of thunder.[47] A.J. Lawrence assumes that this was accomplished by "rolling an iron bullet down an inclined wooden trough provided here and there with slight obstructions

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47 Thunder and strange noises occur throughout The Tempest. "He vanishes in thunder", "Enter Caliban with a burden of wood. A noise of thunder is heard."

over which it crashed", [48] or by shaking a barrel filled with stones. Lightning, too, was reproduced. Neither of these effects, however, are required in the production of Hamlet. From the hut, too, ordnance was shot off. In the last fatal scene of the play, the King speaks:

> Let all the battlements their ordnance fire,
> .. ..
> And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
> The trumpet to the canoneer without,
> The cannons to the heavens, the heaven to earth.
> Now the king drinks to Hamlet. (V, 2).

In any play dealing with court life the trumpeter was an important member of the acting troup and throughout Hamlet he was kept fairly busy. Sometimes the fanfares were played within and sometimes the trumpeter, or trumpeters were included in the procession on the stage. [49] In Hamlet there is little of the type of music that fills such plays as A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, or The Tempest. The music consists of either the commanding notes of the trumpets, or the thin reedy notes of the hautboy (our modern oboe). With the former the effect is martial; in the case of the latter, the effect is melancholy. [50] The songs of Ophelia are not guaranteed to lend cheer to the mood of the play, while the incongruity of the first gravedigger's song only enhances the tragic effect.

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48 Lawrence, W.J. Pre-Restoration Stage Studies, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1927).

49 Hamlet, III, 2.

50 Hamlet, III, 2.

There is, finally, the economic aspect of the production of Hamlet on the Globe stage. Here again it is in notable contrast to our modern production where expense sheets contain enormous items for sets, properties, costumes, lighting, rental of building, stars, supernumeraries, stagehands, advertising, and, the unkindest cut of all -- union wages to musicians. This lengthy expense list easily explains the high cost of admission to theatres today. In Elizabethan productions of Hamlet there was no expenditure on lighting, on supernumeraries, sets and set designers, or on advertising; and compared to twentieth century productions much less was spent on properties, star actors, and atagehands. Fabulous sums were not paid for scripts, nor for the adaptation of them. [51]

The Burbages and the five housekeeper members of their company owned the Globe building so they had only to finance the maintenance of it. Since it was built on freehold property, there were no taxes. The playhouse itself, while admittedly a fine building for its day, was not an elaborate and expensive one. As it has already been pointed out, the company was a compact group, each member shouldering a variety of duties. W.J. Lawrence suggestw that once the gatherers of the gate receipts had turned in their money boxes to the treasurer, they then did duty for the rest of the performance as supers -- "an illustration of the fact that in the Elizabethan theater there was little specialisation of function." [52] Costume, alone, is the one item on the Elizabethan expense account which might be in the same proportion to the amount spent in modern productions

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51 Mantzius, K.A. A History of Theatrical Art, London, 1904, p. 141. It is pointed out that Henslowe paid no more than eleven pounds for any play.

52 Lawrence, W.T. Old Theatre Days and Ways, p. 95.

of Hamlet.

Since the cost of production, then, was lower, the admission price was proportionately lower. Because of the tremendous decrease in the purchasing power of money during the intervening centuries, it is difficult to estimate the relative cost between the two eras of production. But price for entrance to the yard seems to have been a penny. Another penny was charged for the rental of a stool. The gentlemen's rooms in the gallery above stage were "twelvepenny rooms;" but after 1600, it became popular for the gallants to sit on the stage and possibly the same price obtained for this coveted position. The first gallery commanded the highest price, the other two being cheaper. The first gallery was divided into boxes, while the second and third possibly had stools and benches which could be rented for the performance. From this, it is easily understood that playgoing in Elizabethan days was a far different matter from our modern "two-on-the-aisle" practice. Lower production costs meant that the producers could afford to present a new play without fear of its being a financial "flop". It might be an aesthetic or dramatic flop; but the money boxes of the gatherers would be no lighter for it. That particular play was simply removed from the repertoire. Each acting company also had its money-making productions, called "get-penny" plays and were revivals of such favourites as Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, or Kyd's Spanish Tragedy.[53]

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53 Chambers, E.K. The Elizabethan Stage, I, p. 372.

The last factor to be considered as far as the economics of Shakespere's theatre are concerned, is the competition of other dramatic productions. There were at least five adult companies playing in London at the same time, and three or four boys' companies. The latter seem to have been bitter rivals of the adult companies in general, and the Globe Company in particular. Shakespere shows concern over this situation and devotes over forty lines in Hamlet to a discussion of the "little eyases" who "are now the fashion" and who "berattle the common stages." But competition is supposedly the life of trade, and the Globe Company did not seem to suffer. They were acknowledged the leading company in London and made regular appearances at court during the latter years of Elizabeth's reign.[54]

There was one form of competition with which the public playhouses did not have to cope -- the movies. True, Elizabethans had their bear-baiting pits, cock-fights and wrestling bouts, but these did not represent the threat to financial returns at the playhouse door, that the movies do to the legitimate theatre's box-office today. The public playhouse, in fact, enjoyed the same popularity as modern movie houses do.

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54 Finally in 1603 they were appointed the King's Men and granted special privileges, such as the wearing of the King's livery.

The problem now at hand is to sum up the Elizabethan production of Hamlet in terms of artistic aims and artistic achievements. Perhaps, the answer to the first part of this question - 'What were the artistic aims of Shakespere and his company?' - may be gained by a negative approach. The aim was not the presentation of an elaborately staged and eye-filling spectacle. The playwright wrote for an almost-bare stage - a stage that was "cleared for action." The presence of stage scenery and extensive use of properties would have served only to chain down the action and to impede the development of the plot.

The aim was not to set forth one actor, or perhaps two, around whom the action of the play revolved and to whom all the best speeches were given. True, Hamlet is the part in the play, and when Burbage played it he must have realized what a plum he had pulled from the Shakespearean pie. But because Hamlet was a "fat" part, it does not mean that the other characters are not full-bodied parts. They are quite able to stand on their own two feet. Not only that, but the full interpretation of their parts is as necessary in revealing Hamlet's character as his own conversations and soliloquies are. It was the aim to present the play as a well-knit dramatic piece; it was not intended to be a "vehicle" for a star actor.

It was not the aim of the author and action to present Hamlet as a laboratory problem in psychology. The Elizabethans who made up the audience enjoyed and appreciated Hamlet's soul-probings, not because they

had a clinical interest in psychoanalysis, but because they, too, were beset by problems, and, unlike Hamlet, were unable to put them into words. At this time the sceptred isle was in constant threat of invasion; the new commercialism and trade, the advent of the new middle-class had overturned and uprooted old ways and old ideas; England was seething with unrest, political, religious and social. Life was ~~xixxr~~ stirring; it was also complex and ambiguous. The man with an uncomplicated life has little sensitivity towards complications in another's life. Elizabethan lives were not simple; they could appreciate Hamlet's predicament, and the playgoers found a relief for their own inarticulateness in Hamlet's expression of his tortured thoughts.

And finally, Shakespere himself stated his aim when he spoke of the purpose of playing "whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." He does not mention elaborate staging; he does not say that one actor in the group must be able "to carry it away"; he does not mention costumes, properties, or scenic effects. He says simply, "hold the mirror up to nature." The important thing to Shakespere when he wrote Hamlet was the story; he never loses sight of that. The important thing to him and his colleagues in producking Hamlet was the unfolding of that story and of the characters who were a part of it. In short, "the play's the thing."

To assess the artistic achievement of a theatrical performance of over three hundred years ago is difficult, if not impossible. Knowing the aims and knowing the methods, however, we can build the rest on conjecture. First of all, the curious harmony which existed between the three A's -- author, actors, and audience -- must be kept in mind. Each had an understanding of the other's scope and limitations, and each reacted correspondingly. The author knew his audience was a heterogeneous group as to social rank and intellectual capacity. Although he might consider that the censure of the judicious must "o'erweigh a whole theatre of others ," yet he knew it was his function to put before the "unskilful" things they could understand and appreciate -- the ghost scenes, the dumb-show, the pageantry of the court, and the crude clowning of the grave-diggers. He knew intimately the conventions and practices of his stage and its actors, and he tailored Hamlet to fit these conventions. It is the old story of the locomotive on the tract. The train is forced to run along its two rails; it can go only where the tracks lead it. But it is only by running on these two rails that it realizes its freedom. It was so with Shakespere's stage.

A second major consideration in summing up the achievement of Shakespere's methods is in remembering that the scripts were presented "cured and perfect of their limbs;" Shakespere was still active on the stage and an alien hand had hacked and pruned the plays. This is an advantage that must not be overlooked. We can safely assume that, barring some actors who "imitated humanity so abominably," the plays

were presented as their author intended they should be.

Mark Van Doren remarks,

> We shall be confirmed in our belief that the character of Hamlet is the character of an actor, and that the instinct of Shakespere as a dramatic poet is to pour his fullest gifts into such persons. [55]

These were the "fullest gifts" that the actors in Shakespere's company laid before their audience in the Globe Theatre; these were the "fullest gifts" the Elizabethan audience joyfully received.

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55 Van Doren, Mark. Shakespere, (New York, 1939), p. 200.

CHAPTER III

Subsequent History of Hamlet in Production

> The Forbes-Robertson Hamlet at the Lyceum is ... really not at all unlike Shakespere's play of the same name. I am quite certain I saw Reynaldo in it for a moment; and possibly I may have seen Voltimand and Cornelius; but just as the time for their scene arrived, my eye fell on the word 'Fortinbras' in the programme, which so amazed me that I hardly knew what I saw for the next ten minutes .... The story of the play was perfectly intelligible and quite took the attention of the audience off the principal actor at moments. What is the Lyceum coming to? [1]

What the Lyceum had come to was indicative of what theatres all over the world had come to in producing Shakespere's plays, and in particular, Hamlet. Forbes-Robertson, of the late Victorian era, had staged a minor rebellion against common theatrical practice in England, and this rebellion had elicited the favourable, although caustic comment of the drama critic of the Saturday Evening Review, George Bernard Shaw. What Shaw has to say of the Forbes-Robertson production gives us an inkling that many changes had been effected in the production of Hamlet in the intervening years since it had been presented on the Globe stage by Shakespere's company. There were even greater changes to come, in the staging of this and of nearly all plays, and the new trend can be dated roughly from the year 1900. This new movement in the theatre, or rather, the realization that there was need for a new emphasis in theatrical

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[1] Shaw, G. B., Dramatic Opinions and Essays, II, N.Y., 1907, p. 316.

production, was powerfully affected by the teachings of two articulate theatre craftsmen, Edward Gordon Craig, and Adolphe Appia.

Before discussing the part played by these two men in the revolt against contemporary methods of staging, it is best to see just what the methods against which they revolted were (it could even be said, "are") and how they have come about. This can be done by outlining briefly the career of Hamlet as a stage production from its Globe presentation in Elizabeth's day to the time of Shaw's comment on Forbes-Robertson's Hamlet.

The influence of the Elizabethan court had ever been strong on theatrical tastes and methods. Shakespere's plays were popular there, and many, including Hamlet, were presented by the actors of the Globe play-house. Revised methods of staging were necessary at Court -- it was indoors, and artificial lighting had to be used. The stage was usually a platform at the end of the hall, and stage properties and costumes seem to have been more elaborate than those used in the public theatres. Another difference was the use of a painted cloth or curtain at the back of the platform. [2]

Staging at the Court grew more and more elaborate, and by the time James I had succeeded Elizabeth on the throne of England, a tradition had been established for magnificent court productions. The Italian stage, with its lavish painted settings and complicated stage machinery had exerted its influence on Englishmen travelling in Italy, and one

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2 Thorndike, A. H., Shakespeare's Theatre, New York, 1916, Ch. VI.

of these, Inigo Jones, in turn brought this influence to bear on English theatre practice. Jones was in a position to do so, since he was court architect, and was responsible for the staging and costuming of court productions. Like Elizabeth's Court in the last few years of her reign, James I's Court preferred the lighter romantic pieces to heavy tragedy or chronicle history plays. To these lighter tastes the masque fitted perfectly. It was a combination of acting, dancing and singing with a pastoral background and theme. Usually the masque had little in the way of plot or characterization to sustain it, and depended mainly on extravagant setting and costuming, as well as trick stage devices, for theatrical effectiveness. They were theatrically effective, but that is the most that can be said of them. Only a few showed any worth as literature, and those few are mostly from the pen of Ben Jonson. Between him as Court playwright, and Inigo Jones as Court Stage Designer, began a battle which has been continued through the intervening centuries of theatrical history. The outcome is not yet decided; but Jonson adds one more leaf to his laurel of fame as the first dramatist of the modern world to suffer the frustration of seeing his plays almost completely buried in the trappings of elaborate stage production.

Jones' two chief contributions to the English theatre are first, the introduction of painted sets, usually consisting of a series of shutters or wing flats, with a painted backdrop, and second, the introduction of the proscenium arch, whose use was necessitated by the introduction of such sets just mentioned. This meant that the stage, from being a neutral background that could represent any locale, either indoor or outdoor, had

become a localized setting.[3] From this time on, the structural change in the playhouse amounted to a gradual pushing back of the neutral platform, and the gradual expanding of the inner recess into the playing space proper. The platform became an enlarged apron jutting well into the orchestra, but gradually shrank back to a point where it extended only a few feet beyond the line of the proscenium arch. This final change did not take place, however, until the middle of the nineteenth century, when stage directors began to make full use of the stage curtain.[4]

There is one theatre to be mentioned before going on to the closing of the playhouses by the Puritans, and their re-opening during the Restoration. This playhouse is Blackfriars, after 1608 the winter quarters of Shakespere's company. Many of the changes in production methods mentioned in connection with the Court, apply to Blackfriars productions as well. It was a so-called private theatre, and as such, was able to charge more for admission. The Blackfriars audience, then, was perhaps a bit more refined than that which crowded the Globe on a summer afternoon. The stage, as at Court, was at one end of a rectangular shaped hall, presumably with galleries, and benches in the section that corresponded to the pit. Since it was a closed, and not an open-air building, certain refinements in the delivery of lines were doubtless effected. Apart from the introduction of candlelight as illumination, and of more elaborate stage properties, the productions of Hamlet would

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3 Thorndike, A. H. Chapter VII.

4 Nicoll, A., The Development of the Theatre, London, 1927, pp. 187,190.

be much the same as those on the Globe stage. The chief difference was in the audience. Women made up a large part of it, and the crowd was certainly more fashionable than at the Globe, which, however, maintained its reputation as the most popular public theatre. "Blackfriars", says A. H. Thorndike, "became the model for the private theatres, the Salisbury Court and the Cockpit, and hence, through their descendants in the Restoration period, the direct ancestor of all modern English theatres." [5]

In the matter of stage presentations, the Court of Charles I was much the same as that of James I, and perhaps even more elaborate. In 1642, however, the Puritans with the same holy zeal that had characterized their trial and beheading of the unhappy Charles, closed all places of amusement, including the theatres. During the next eighteen years, all theatrical activity was ceased, or rather, suspended, for there were illegal productions which exposed those participating in them to the risk of punishment. Shortly after Charles II became king, and the monarchy was restored, the theatres were reopened by his order. They were much like those of the earlier Caroline period; but since the Puritan feeling that had been responsible for the closing of these "hotbeds of evil" eighteen years earlier was still shared by many of the common people, the theatre became the property of Charles, his courtiers, and fashionable hangers-on. It was as if the dandies who had sat on stools on the stage of the Globe had been multiplied in number until they formed the body of the audience. Like their spiritual ancestors, they came more to be seen than to see, and the theatre became a meeting place for fashionable and witty folk. The king

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5 Thorndike, A. H., p. 70.

extended active and interested patronage, as witness whereof he once lent his coronation robes to Thomas Betterton, the leading actor of this period. [6] For nearly thirty years, starting in 1660, with the re-opening of the theatres, Betterton dominated the stage, and one of his favourite roles was that of Hamlet. In 1668 Pepys wrote in his diary: "To the Duke of York's Playhouse and saw Hamlet which we have not seen this year before, or more; and mightily pleased with it; but, above all, with Betterton, the best part, I believe, that man ever acted." [7]

An outstanding change in theatre practice was the introduction of actresses on the stage. Unfortunately most of those belonging to this period are known more as the mistresses of England's nobility, (the most famous of these being the King's mistress, Nell Gwynn) than as actresses of true dramatic worth. There were some capable actresses, however, and their presence on the stage was an improvement that was more than decorative. In Hamlet, a woman playing the part of Ophelia, or especially of Gertrude, allowed for a fuller interpretation not only of the part itself, but of the theme of the play. Claudius' motive for killing Hamlet's father is made more understandable:

> I am still possest
> Of these effects for which I did the murder, --
> My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen. (III, iii).

Assuming these to be in ascending order of importance, it can be understood that the portrayal of the part of the Queen by a woman gives greater credence to the Claudius - Gertrude story. [8]

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6 Nicoll, Allardyce, The English Theatre, London, 1936, p. 91.

7 McAfee, Helen, Pepys on the Restoration Stage, New Haven, 1916, p. 66. (Entry, dated 31 August 1668).

8 My own experience in seeing Hamlet on the stage for the first time bears out this conclusion.

There was little improvement made in illumination, beyond the setting of candles in candelabra which overhung the stage. The auditorium, as well as the stage, was lit by this guttering source of light; it was flattering, but it must have been difficult for those at the back of the theatre to see the actors, or keep their eyes trained on the stage. At the same time, scenery was becoming more lavish; the set painter was coming into his own. Flats set in grooves were used, and the castle at Elsinore was doubtless painted in careful perspective detail on a series of wing flats.

The eighteenth century saw more and more attention paid to setting, and the actors, instead of using the apron or outer stage for most of their acting, were moving in towards the scenery that was set behind the proscenium opening, and more within the picture frame. Spectacle productions were the rage, and the ingenuity of the stage-machinist was as heavily taxed as it had been during Inigo Jones' rule as stage director. The influence of opera and its grandiose scale of staging may account for a portion of this tendency. After the half-century mark, however, there is a new influence bringing results which have lasted to this day. The influence was realism, * and itsadherents rejected the arrangements of side wings in indoor scenes, substituting for them an arrangement of flats which formed a box set. [9] This form of indoor setting reached its peak of popularity during the Naturalistic era of the late Nineteenth century, and is still generally used on both the professional and amateur

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[9] Nicoll, Allardyce, The Development of the Theatre, p. 174.

* This was the first manifestation of that influence; it was not an integrated part of stage settings until after the late Nineteenth century.

stage.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Loutherbourg, the scene designer at David Garrick's theatre, Drury Lane, made several advances in staging technique. Perspective painting, sound effects, and improved lighting seem to have been his forte -- all contributing to the romantic effect of production at a time when the emphasis on romanticism was becoming increasingly apparent in English literature and art. Garrick, in addition to his contribution as an actor, introduced side lighting to the English theatre, which greatly improved the stage picture. Costuming, as in the time of Elizabeth, was done in the fashion of the day, and eighteenth century spectators saw nothing grotesque in Hamlet garbed in satin breeches, coat and cravat of contemporary style, and wearing a powdered court wig. What seems even stranger to us is that they accepted Cleopatra in a full-skirted and panniered gown of rustling silk, the one concession to geographical, if not historial, authenticity of costume being the addition of feather plumes to her distinctly eighteenth century headdress. [10] It was not until the 1820's and the time of Kemble that historical authenticity of costumes was made the rule.

If he saw nothing inconsistent in playing Hamlet in contemporary dress, David Garrick saw much that was inconsistent and undesirable about contemporary methods of acting and staging. It was he who introduced a more natural style of acting, as opposed to the declamatory style of his predecessors. It was Carrick, also, who saw the necessity of a director-manager for a playing company, and filling this part in the leading theatre of England of that day, the Drury Lane Theatre, he added much to the art of play production. The discipline he exerted over his company helped to

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[10] Nicoll. Allardyce, The Development of the Theatre, p. 183, Fig. 235.

elevate the actor's calling in the eyes of a public all too ready to criticize. Unfortunately for Shakespere, and for Hamlet, Garrick had been a playwright before he had become an actor, and he not only wielded a blue pencil heavily in preparing the script, but also was wont to tuck in a speech here and there, either of his own making, or plucked from another of Shakespere's plays.

> He (Garrick) scored his own greatest success in Shakesperian parts, and he made productions of no fewer than twenty-four of Shakespere's plays. The less said about the way he adapted these plays, the better. Let us grant that it was a step toward a more dignified and nobler stage that he should revive the great Elizabethan so fully, after the vogue of Restoration comedy and heroic tragedy. [11]

One other figure dominates the stage during the latter part of the Eighteenth century, who, like Garrick, lent the acting profession a dignity which it had lost during the Restoration period. It was Sarah Siddons, who, with her brother, John Philip Kemble, reigned as monarchs of the English stage during the latter part of the Eighteenth and the beginning of the Nineteenth century. Kemble was part-time manager of the Drury Lane Theatre, and as producer of Shakesperian plays, innovated the use of so-called "authentic" settings. Here, again, the scene painter was brought to the fore.

The Nineteenth century saw great changes in the production of Hamlet, and most of these were brought about by new methods of staging necessitated by improved lighting. The introduction of gas lighting set the stage securely within the proscenium arch, and it became more distinctly a

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[11] Cheney, Sheldon, The Theatre, p. 350.

picture or peep-hole stage. The curtain had become almost a character in the play itself, since it provided a theatrical thrill all its own as it fell on the closing lines of a scene. While the lighting was improving, the settings were not. "Flied" scenery had been introduced from the Continent, and backstage was a wilderness of painted flats, flies, and curtain drops. The scene painter for some years had been outdoing himself, and not only trees, lakes, and rivers were depicted on flat canvas, but whole walls of a room, including bookcases, chairs, and paintings were faithfully reproduced to represent the real thing. This "painty" method of staging was to result in a revolt against such methods, and the substitution instead, of naturalistic settings, a method which, in turn, brought forth another revolt.[12]

In the Nineteenth Century, the theatres had become more pretentious edifices; productions were more showy, and the tradition of long runs was established. In these pageant-like productions, it took an actor of some magnitude to hold his own, and so developed the tradition of star acting. The play was a vehicle for the actor, and not only did he surround himself with actors of inferior talents, but in producing such a play as Hamlet, he often did away with many of the parts themselves. It was this tendency that prompted Shaw to make the comment on the Forbes-Robertson production of Hamlet that appears at the opening of this chapter. Sir Henry Irving, the leading actor of the late Victorian era drew Shaw's wrath more than

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12 William Winter, drama critic for the New York Tribune, wrote in 1884, in a review of the Irving-Terry production of Much Ado About Nothing: "Much of the scenery habitually used on the American stage is too obviously 'scenery' and it may be said to smell of new paint". (From The American Theatre: 1752 - 1934: Ed. by Moses & Brown, N.Y. 1934, p. 93.)

once, and in the Introduction to Ellen Terry and George Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence, Shaw says:

> He achieved the celebrated feat of performing Hamlet with the part of Hamlet omitted and all the other parts as well, substituting for it and for them the fascinating figure of Henry Irving which for many years did not pall on his audience, and never palled on himself. 13

Admittedly Shaw was biased on the subject of Irving, but his remarks serve to emphasize the fact that the actor, and not the play, was the thing.

It happened that Shaw, on his part, contributed to another trend in the theatre, a trend that had started in the early eighteenth century, and which, in its final phase, brought about the revolt of such men as Craig and Appia. The trend is naturalism. It had been waylaid by the scene painter who had attempted to depict naturalism with paint on canvas. It had come into its own again when the scene painter had overstepped the modesty of nature by relying too much on that paint and canvas. Bookcases that rippled absurdly in a backstage draught, chairs that obviously could not be moved, let alone sat upon -- these were beginning to intrude upon not only the actors' but the audience's consciousness as absurdities. The time had come for a change.

Unfortunately, the pendulum swung too far in the opposite direction. In the abolishing of the obviously false, the emphasis came to rest on the obviously real. In a measure this was a worthwhile change. Solid box sets

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13 Ellen Terry and George Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence, New York, 1931, p. xxii.

were substituted for flimsy flats; they had to be solid to support the real doors and windows which were built into them. But the emphasis on realism went further than this. Real flowers filled the flower pots, real books sat on the real bookshelves, real food filled the dishes on the real table. The question arises: What had Shaw to do with this? and the answer is found in the reading of stage directions to any of his plays. There were so minute as almost to specify the kind of china with which Mrs. Dubebat set her table. The stage director or scene designer was left no choice or opportunity to make his own interpretation; it was all set down for him in the stage directions.

It was the production, too, of such plays as Shaw's intellectual comedies, or Ibsen's "slice-of-life" realistic dramas, that crowded out Shakesperian plays and relegated them to the revival list. Up to the twentieth century, all first-run companies kept Shakespere (and particularly his Hamlet) in their repertoires; after 1900, apart from such groups as the Stratford-on-Avon players, the performance of Shakespere's plays is a special event rather than a regular theatre presentation.

In the theatres of the world, the trend of naturalism has been furthered by the development of electric lighting. Another aid was magnificent stage machinery by which a completely set stage on a kind of wagon could be wheeled into place, then at the drop of the curtain, it could be moved to the left while the next completely set stage could be wheeled in from the right. Undoubtedly this speeded production, but it gave the scene designer ample chance to make the setting complete in manifold detail. In New York David Belasco made history with the production of The Governor's Lady by reproducing a part of the interior

of a restaurant. Of this production Arthur Hopkins, noted director and producer, said: "It is only remarkable because it is not real." [14]

It was this super-realism that roused the ire of Edward Gordon Craig, son of Ellen Terry, England's beloved first lady of the stage. Craig started out as an actor in Sir Henry Irving's company, and, inheriting the talents of his father, the architect and designer, Edward Godwin, began designing settings for the stage. These drawings, along with his first publication, The Art of the Theatre, completely astounded most of the theatrical world. As self-appointed executioner of old methods of staging, Craig wielded a weapon that was two-edged and often hacked at himself. One of the first practices to come under his axe was naturalism, and of it he says:

> The naturalistic stepped in on the stage because the artificial had grown finicking, insipid; but do not forget that there is such a thing as a noble artificiality ..... This tendency towards the natural has nothing to do with art, and is abhorrent when we meet it in everyday life. [15]

Craig's criticism was constructive, and he advocated in place of the naturalistic and representational stage, the presentational stage. The latter made no pretense at being what it obviously could not be, as the former pretended to be milady's boudoir, or the ramparts of a castle. The presentational stage was, as the Greek orchestra had been, a place for acting, a neutral background for actors. It did not, as the representational stage tried to, say to the audience, "You are not really

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14 Brown, J. M., Two On The Aisle, New York, 1938, p. 173.

15 Craig, E. G., On The Art of the Theatre, London, 1911, p. 35.

sitting in a theatre, you are sitting along the fourth wall of the grand hall of the castle." Instead, it reminded them that they were in the theatre, that the space on which they trained their eyes was designed especially for the actors who presented a play there. In other words, the presentational stage was frankly theatrical in the best sense of the word.

Craig deplored the lack of form in the art of the theatre, and, since there was no form, he said, there could be no beauty. The lack of beauty and form contributed to the lack of unity, which he stressed as the most important requirement in theatrical productions. "Unity is the one thing vital to a work of art." [16] The well-known quotation from The Art of the Theatre is applicable here:

> The Art of the Theatre is neither acting nor the play, it is not scene nor dance, but it consists of all the elements of which these things are composed; action, which is the very spirit of acting; words, which are the body of the play; line and colour, which are the very heart of the scene; rhythm, which is the very essence of dance .. .. One is no more important than the other, no more than one colour is more important to a painter than another, or one note more important than another to a musician. [17]

To achieve this unity, he advocated that those who contributed to the art of the theatre should be men of the theatre, and not simply scene painters, designers, musicians and other artists brought in to assist. These men of the theatre were to be unified under one boss, (since there

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16 Craig, E.G., On the Art of the Theatre, London, 1911, p. 157.

17 Ibid, p. 138.

had always been too many in the theatre) for, said Craig: "It is impossible for a work of art ever to be produced where more than one brain is permitted to direct." [18] This one 'boss' (who was the stage director *) should be master of all parts that made up the whole of theatre production. Craig's enemies, who are many and vociferous /, always comment that the implication in Craig's writings is that he is to be that Stage Director. It is the function of the Stage Director to concern himself with the theme, the very heart of the play, and to understand it, looking at it from every point of view.

In 1911 Craig had the opportunity as Stage Director to put his theories into practice when he produced Hamlet with the Moscow Art Theatre. Several years earlier he had written that Hamlet was unproduceable, that it was complete when Shakespere wrote it, "and for us to add to it by gesture, costume or dance, is to hint that it is incomplete and needs additions." He deplored the tendency to cut Shakespere's plays, saying, "If you wish to act them, act them in their entirety or do not act them at all." [19] Since actors delivered Shakespere's lines so slowly, and scene waits were lengthy, Craig rightly concluded that it was virtually impossible to produce Hamlet in its entirety.

It was characteristic that he should fly in the face of his own decree; but it is significant that when he produced Hamlet, he did so

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18 Ibid, p. 99.

19 Ibid, p. 143, p. 285.

* In England the term "producer" is used instead of "director".

/ Lee Simonson is one of the more articulate of these. (See The Stage Is Set, by Lee Simonson.)

in the most famous theatre of Europe, or indeed, of the world. Of the Moscow Art Theatre more will be said later, but it is sufficient to note here that they were quick to absorb new ideas in the theatre. The period of preparation for this production lasted three years, and for it Craig designed a neutral setting of tall screens whose position could be changed for the various scenes. The screens were gold in the court scenes, white in others, while in the costumes of the King, Queen, and courtiers, gold predominated. He interpreted his Hamlet "in the terms of a supernatural conflict between the powers of good and evil."[20] With the assistance of clever lighting and the interplay of darkness and light on this neutral background, his intention was to symbolize Hamlet's struggle between life and death.

Opinions vary on the success of Craig's effort. Bakshy says conservatively that it had a somewhat mixed reception in Russia; Stanislavsky, the director of the Moscow Art Theatre, records that the company had trouble with the screens, first in hitting upon the right material for construction (after many tests, traditional wooden frames covered with unpainted canvas were used), and then when the screens were set up, they caused great consternation by collapsing like a house of cards an hour before show time. He says further that they dwarfed the actors, and "the more we tried to make the production simple, the stronger it reminded us of itself, the more it seemed pretentious and displayed its showy naïveté".[21] The reviewer of the London Times

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20 Bakshy, A., The Path of the Modern Russian Stage, London, 1916, p.52.

21 Stanislavsky, C., My Life In Art, Boston, 1924, p. 524.

reacted favourably, remarking on the effectiveness of the screens in providing spiritual symbolism, "every line, every space of light and shadow going directly to heighten and amplify the significance of that action." [22] Of his own production Craig said that it convinced him more strongly than ever that Shakespere's plays were unactable, and that they were a bore when acted. [23]

It may have been sour grapes that made Craig say this; that, at least, was the impression he created. He had the unfortunate habit of taunting those who opposed his ideas. His book, The Theatre Advancing, has this for its dedication: "To The Enemy, With A Prayer That They Will Be Stronger, More Malicious and Anyhow, Funnier Than They Have Been In the Past". Many of his theories remained just theories -- they were impractical, if not impossible, in application. John Mason Brown speaks of Craig's mind as being contradictory and so full of inconsistencies as to suggest that he was a cross between an Inigo Jones and an Aimee Semple McPherson!

> It (Craig's style) can be as irritating as it is satisfying, as shrill as it is musical, as colloquial as it is eloquent, and as pettish as it is prophetic. .. .. .. The amazing thing about Mr. Craig is that often he himself does succeed in rubbing the dry sticks of his sentences together so that sparks seem to fly afterwards from them. It is because of these sparks of his, and the widespread light they have cast, that the modern theatre stands deeply in his debt. [24]

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22 Quoted by Sheldon Cheney, Stage Decoration, p. 86.

23 Craig, E.G., Op. cit., p. 285.

24 Brown, J.M., Two On the Aisle, p. 108.

Whether Craig's theories were practical or impossible is not important; what is important is that he managed to drive home to men of the theatre the necessity for reform, not, as he put it, of a single craft but of all other crafts of the theatre. "The whole renaissance of the Art of the Theatre depends upon the extent that this is realized." [25]

In Italy had been born another prophet of the New Theatre. Actually Adolphe Appia was doing more than preaching, he was practising his beliefs as well, but it was not in his native land. Most of his work was done in Germany in connection with Wagnerian music drama. He had foreshadowed Craig's work by several years, but his work was done in the field of opera production, while Craig is more closely associated with the theatre proper. He had evinced the same disgust with the naturalistic and realistic setting. Like Craig, he recognized the necessity of a stage director or regisseur in complete control of stage production. There were three ways in which Appia gave unity to his stage. The first was in the designing of a plastic, three-dimensional stage in which the actor could move freely, and was not made to look absurd against a painted setting representing three dimensions. In this respect, Appia's stage could be described as sculptural.

"The body," said Appia in L'Ouvre d'Art Vivante, "the living moving body of the actor represents movement in space. Its role is therefore of capital importance." [26] A second unifying force was light -- not the

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[25] Craig, E.G., Op. cit., p. 177.

[26] Appia, A., A Work of Living Art (Translated by Rœamond Gilder) Theatre Arts Magazine, Vol. XVI, viii, p. 672.

brightly diffused light that was shed evenly on all objects on the stage, but the light that casts shadows and gives an emotional quality to the object it strikes. The third aid to unity was music; Appia had fallen under the spell of Wagner's music-drama. "Music and music alone," he says, "can co-ordinate all the elements of scenic presentation into a completely harmonious whole." [27] This was written in Die Musik und die Inscenierung, a slim volume not translated into English. It was illustrated by eighteen projected settings for Wagnerian operas, so forcibly drawn, that, declares Lee Simonson, "Practitioners of stage-craft were converted by a set of illustrations to a gospel which most of them never read." [28]

In 1925, Appia prepared a set of stage designs for Hamlet, and accompanied them with a set of explanatory notes.

> I am convinced that entirely too much importance is given to the idea of the setting for Hamlet. One must not in any way extract this setting from the drama itself: this would be to accumulate redundancies all evening! The drama is perfectly sufficient unto itself .. .. If we stress the interest in the exterior world upon the stage, we falsify and weaken the conflict. [29]

The group of designs Appia made for the play illustrate this contention; all are starkly simple, and all suggest the tremendous emotional power

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27 Quoted by Lee Simonson in The Stage Is Set, p. 353. Jean Mercier, in an article entitled "Adolphe Appia" makes this distinction between Craig and Appia. "He (Appia) rebuilt everything in its relation to music. .. .. But Craig was free in his reform; the reform of Appia was dominated by a major force -- music." (Theatre Arts Magazine, Vol. XVI, viii, p. 628.)

28 Simonson, Lee, The Stage Is Set, p. 353.

29 Van Wyck, J.D., "Designing Hamlet With Appia", Theatre Arts, IX, i, p.18. This issue of Theatre Arts was devoted to Appia, and contained articles on his work by Jean Mercier, Rosamond Gilder, Jessica Davis Van Wyck, and Lee Simonson. It also included six of the designs Appia made for Hamlet.

of lighting as he handled it. He stressed the necessity for speed in the production, as an aid to unity, and explained that the setting, although constantly changing, would give the impression of unity. The intention was to alternate deep and shallow scenes -- another means of speeding the production. In one design, which consists of a bare stage platform on two levels, there is a right-angled tread of steps which seem to drop off into an infinity suggested by the background of contrasting light and shadow. This illustration Appia titled, "The rest is silence ... "

The theories of Appia and Craig were espoused and put into practice first by countries other than their native lands. As a result of the circulation of their writings and designs, a new movement began in stage decoration and production in the theatres of the world. It may be incorrect to say that this new movement was a result of, rather than a change simultaneous with the publishing of their works. Perhaps they had simply put into words and sketches what other men of the theatre had been thinking and working towards. It is important that they were able to express it, and by so doing have earned for themselves the titles of prophets and motivators of this new movement.

The keynote of the new movement was a simplification of setting. This simplification was not only in the new trends that originated in the theories of Craig and Appia, but also in the already-existing methods of staging. The naturalistic method, for instance, was modified so that it ceased to draw attention to itself as being actually real. Faster scene changes resulting from this simplification, improvements in lighting, and the designing of scenic clothes all contributed to the mood of the

play being produced, and, incidentally, to its unity. This method of "tasteful realism" is perhaps the most widely used of stage settings today.

Another compromise was the introduction of a semi-permanent or unit setting in which are two or three portals. These remain stationary throughout the production and provide a semi-neutral setting in which simpler changes of scene can be effected. A curtain is dropped behind one or two of the portals, and third is used as a door. In another scene, one portal might be fitted as a window, an alcove or an altar. Another arrangement is achieved leaving open the part of the stage back of the portals, and backing it with another curtain or scenic drop. A variation of this method of staging was effectively used by Claude Bragdon in designing the set for Walter Hampden's production of Hamlet.

The new movement in the theatre is represented by three main types of staging -- Architectural Staging, Space Staging, and Constructivist Staging. It is dangerous to be too dogmatic in defining these stages, since many of their characteristics are overlapping, some with offshoots of their own, and other methods-within-methods are common to all of them. Each of them, however, is a presentational stage, that is, frankly a platform for acting.

The architectural stage consists of permanent stage architecture without a proscenium arch. To this stage there are several levels, affording great freedom of movement to the actors, and to the director adequate opportunities for effective groupings of the actors. Changes in

scene are accomplished by the effective use of lighting. The various scenes can be localized by the use of simple properties, adaptable screens, panels, and hangings. It is easily seen that the architectural stage makes for a more economical, as well as a more unified production.

An offshoot of the architectural stage is the plastic or sculptural stage. Sheldon Cheney aptly calls it "architecture in the lump" [30] and keeping that definition in mind, we see it as a sculptured mass set in a space stage. The changing and localizing of scenes is wholly dependent upon lighting which, to be effective or even moderately successful, must be very cleverly handled. One of the chief exponents of this method is Norman Bel Geddes, whose production of Hamlet will be dealt with later. Geddes describes this stage as "a place for shaping scenes in light."

The second type of stage is the space stage, and with it the name of Adolphe Appia is inextricably linked. It is a stage whose decks are cleared for action, with nothing to take the audience's attention from the actor. The three-dimensional actor moves through the three-dimensional stage of several acting levels, and his body dominates the scene. Lighting, subtle, expressive, and emotional, unifies the actor and the setting with the mood and theme of the play. Some of the tricks of early Italian Renaissance painters are made use of in chiaroscuro effects achieved by lighting. A northern Renaissance artist also lends his methods, and the famous Rembrandt spot lighting is freely used. * Unlike the

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30 Cheney, S., Stage Decoration, p. 118.

* Not to be confused with vaudeville spot lighting.

architectural stage, the space stage is often set within a proscenium arch, with the traditional stage curtain.

The last trend in modern staging to be dealt with here is Constructivism, which has often been humorously (or maliciously?) called "The Hook-and-Ladder School". The epithet is well-earned, for it consists simply of the scaffolding of a scene with stairs, platforms, and ramps completely innocent of any paint, camouflage, or trimming. "The Constructivists", writes Sheldon Cheney in Stage Decoration, "have uttered a revolutionary cry more radical and far more reaching than any other in the whole history of staging." He goes on to define Constructivism as "a skeleton structure made up of the physically necessary meansfor acting a play." [31] It could almost be called an abstraction of scenery, and, somewhat paradoxically, it is purely functional.

> To its practitioners there seems to be an inherent value in performing a play on two, three, and sometimes four levels, so that actors continuously ascending and descending causeways, stairways and ramps, at times achieve a parody in miniature of mountain climbing. [32]

Variously applied to these three methods of staging are two others, Expressionism and Stylization. They are sometimes expressed in the setting itself, in costume, acting, or even in sound effects. [33] Stylisation is the simpler of the two in application. It may be visual or auditory, or both, and the production so treated is unified by the

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31 Ibid, Ch. XIV "Constructivism".

32 Simonson, Lee, Op. cit., p. 62.

33 Kenneth McGowan records the symbolic use of sound in the Moscow Art Theatre's production of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard. See McGowan and Jones, Continental Stagecraft, New York, 1922, p. 11.

repetition of a motif. In Hamlet, it could be the repetition of a pattern of notes on the oboe, symbolizing the tragic theme. Similar stylizing could be carried out in costumes and setting. Actually, Stylization is more suited to the presentation of the ballet, and Leon Bakst has employed this method in designing eye-filling settings for the Ballets Russes with very effective use of strong colours.

Expressionism is harder to define. Where Realism gives us outer truth, Expressionism seeks to give us inner truth. It does not pretend to be reality, and is often a distortion of the natural and the literal. It ignores objectivity, and replaces it with subjectivity, by attempting to grasp the inner emotional, and spiritual content of the play. To an expressionistic producer the characters in Hamlet, therefore, are not particular people on whom we look objectively, but a group of people who exhibit a pattern of emotions under a certain pattern of circumstances. Expressionist producers aim to give us an emotional generalization not only of the plot, but of the people who present that plot. With its emphasis on emotions, Expressionism, therefore, appeals through the eye, the ear, and the subconscious as well. With this definition in mind, it is easily seen what tremendous possibilities are offered to Expressionist producers, in presenting a play so noted as a revelation of man's soul as Hamlet is.

In summarizing the three new trends in staging, and their corollaries, the advantages offered by these methods must be noted. All of them expedite production and do away with long scene waits which arbitrarily break the spell of the fast pace of Shakespere's drama. All

of them allow more freedom of action to the actors, and more freedom to the director in grouping the actors. Each type affords a unity to the play, and the attention of the audience is not distracted by a variety of settings. And finally, each method can be less expensive in construction, provided this economy is not overbalanced by exorbitant designer's fees, or costly materials.

> The theatre, originally belonging to the masses, in the course of centuries was taken away from the masses and made the property of the privileged classes. The October Revolution gave the theatre back to the people. [34]

These are the words of Alexander Tairov, noted Russian theatre director, and they were written in 1934, seventeen years after the October Revolution. During those years the Russian theatre has developed -- a full-blooded and vigorous theatre which is inalienably linked with the program of state development. One branch of the Russian theatre concerns itself almost solely with the production of propaganda plays, or at least, plays interpreted in terms of state propaganda. Hamlet, as produced by this school of the theatre, represents Claudius as an arch-despot, greedy for power over the people. Indeed, Shakespere is more often than not given a social interpretation of the struggle between the people and the monarchy. [35] This branch of the theatre is progressive in its methods of staging and seeks a greater intimacy between actor and audience. [36]

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[34] Dickinson, T.H., The Theatre In A Changing Europe, New York, 1937, p. 51.

[35] Ibid, p. 84. A sidelight is thrown on this statement by Leo Tolstoi in Tolstoi on Shakespere, London, 1906.

[36] Flanagan, H., Shifting Scenes, New York, 1928, Chapter, "Red Theatre."

Long before the October Revolution, the theatre had flourished in Russia. In 1897 Nimirovich-Danchenko and Constantin Stanislavsky founded the Moscow Art Theatre -- a theatre which is "the home of a troupe unrivalled for ensemble acting. It is today the best known, the most esteemed playing company in the world."[37] It is in the offering as a model to the world an integrated group of actors and theatre craftsmen, united in their aims, painstaking in their endeavours, and under the control of one man that the Moscow Art Theatre has made its greatest contribution. Stanislavsky established the tradition of régisseur in complete control of every detail of production. His word, as his successor's is now, was law and the members of his troupe knew the meaning of discipline.

The methods of staging vary, although they lean towards the tasteful naturalistic enhanced by expressionism. Their style of acting is more outstanding, and is usually described as realistic, and, according to Kenneth McGowan, they "achieve a minute and thorough realism fused into something beyond realism." He goes on to say:

> Here for once are actors who realize the importance of crossing a stage, as a display not of themselves but of their characters. .. .. Their intimacy as people must be as great as the intimacy which they give their characters on the stage. They are an orchestra; their playing is a music, a harmony.[38]

Along with the regular dramatic company there are other groups or studios including a musical studio. In a week's time sixteen or more

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37 Cheney, S., The Theatre, p. 458.

38 McGowan, K. and Jones, R.E., Op. cit., p. 13.

plays and musical productions are offered to the public. [39] Shakespere is frequently presented in their repertoire, and Hamlet is a favourite, as it is throughout the theatres of Russia. [40] One production in 1924 is interesting. Apparently it was stylized in interpretation and set with a series of steps which were shifted here and there for the various scenes. The stylization was manifested in the acting; the actors were divided into two hostile groups, one headed by Hamlet, the other by the King. The latter group was made repulsive by the adoption of a mincing gait, reedy and insincere tones of voice, while the former stood out in con trast by "straight" playing. The company's interpretation of the play was explained on the playbill. (This is a Moscow Art Theatre convention.)

> What interested us in Shakespeare's Hamlet is the juxtaposition of two types of human nature and the development between them of the struggle with each other. One of them is of a protesting nature, heroic, fighting for the affirmation of that which forms the substance of his life. This is our Hamlet. In order to bring out more vividly and to underscore his supreme significance we had to cut the text of the tragedy and eliminate from it everything that might impede its whirlwind impetuosity. [41]

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39 Sayler, O. M., Inside the Moscow Art Theatre, New York, 1925, Chapt. I.

40 See article "Postmark Moscow" in Theatre Arts Magazine, Vol. XXV, No. 11, p. 842. There is mentioned a "Second Shakespearean Conference convened in Moscow by the All-Russian Theatrical society", at which the delegates spoke of the "tremendous popularity of Shakespeare among Soviet theatregoers. In the Veronegh theatre, for example, all tickets for Hamlet were sold out six weeks in advance, and this same performance invariably plays to a full house."

41 Sayler, O.M., Op. cit., p. 167-170.

In My Life In Art, Stanislavsky mentions the difficulties his actors had with the rhythm of Hamlet's lines. "As soon as we attempted verse we fell back upon declamation, a dead see-saw rhythm and a methodical flow of monotonous voices." He confesses he learned much from this realization, and set about conquering this obstacle. Doubtless one way of doing so was in the cutting of Shakespere's lines.

The Moscow Art Theatre has been discussed at length here because it represents the spirit of Russian dramatic practice, although it is not completely typical of Russian theatres. "It is the one theatre in Europe which has served the Revolution while maintaining a rigid standard of artistry," writes T. H. Dickinson. [42] And while Russia plays its magnificent part in the dreadful drama of World War II, its theatre continues to carry to the people the message of such playwrights as William Shakespere in such productions as Hamlet. [43]

As Craig had predicted, Germany was quick to seize hold of new theatrical ideas -- Craig's ideas. German producers had already pioneered in using the turntable stage, as well as many other mechanically devised stages. These greatly speeded the production of such long plays as Hamlet, and scene waits were cut down to a minimum. With the advent of the new emphasis on simplicity of staging, many theatres in Germany adopted and adapted the methods advocated by Craig and Appia. And with the German genius for thoroughness and efficiency, they made a workmanlike job of it.

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42 Dickinson, T.H., Op. cit., p. 25.

43 See Life Magazine, XIV, xiii, pp. 73-75.

The rapid development of the German theatre towards what Craig calls the "New Theatre" was arrested by World War I. After the Armistice the threads were gradually picked up, and now again that development has been broken. Actually, it was bent, if not broken, before the outbreak of hostilities; with the rise to power of the Nazi party, the theatre became more and more a tool of the state, lacking independence in aim and achievement.

The most notable of a group of German régisseurs is Max Reinhardt. His fondness for producing "the classics", as well as his genius for producing them effectively, provides the link with Shakespere, whose plays were very popular in Germany. Reinhardt does not identify himself with any one method of staging; rather, he seems to delight in new methods, and experiments with different types of staging. His aim was to re-establish the intimacy that had existed between the actor and audience when the European theatre was young. Indeed, he went back further than that, re-introducing the Greek orchestra in the circus-theatre which was of his own design. The audience is made to feel part of the production, in which simplicity is the keynote and light the chief source of decoration.

> His principal aim has been throughout to bring the spectator into the action of the drama and to make him live the actor's part in the tiny world formed by the theatre as he lives his own part in the greater social world. [44]

To accomplish this aim, Reinhardt advocated the principle of the "Theatre of the Masses"; the auditorium was to seat upwards of three thousand, and the stage, proportionately large, was to accommodate hundreds. This led

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44 Carter, Huntly, The Theatre of Max Reinhardt, New York, 1914, p. 10.

to such inventions and experiments as The Theatre of Five Thousand, the Circus theatres, and the Redoutensaal, a ballroom theatre with a permanent architectural stage. Reinhardt productions were on the same grand scale as the mammoth theatres in which they took place, and, while the interpretation and theme of his productions emphasized simplicity, the cost of them rose to figures that could only be called "fancy" [45]

Reinhardt produced Hamlet at the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin in 1909, using the space stage as advocated by Appia. The actors, according to observation of photographs of that production, were garbed in costumes which Margaret Webster might describe as being of the "Early Bathrobe period". [46] Another Reinhardt production of Hamlet was done in an architectural setting. [47] A third, produced at the Circus Renz, which seated over three thousand people, did away entirely with the space usually separating actor and audience.

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45 Ibid, p. 240. Cost estimate for the production of The Miracle in London reads: (Figures in English Pounds)

Costumes	12,500	Artists' salaries per week, including,	
Scenery & Props	8,000	Principals	800
Moveable mountain	800	Chorus of 500	1,200
Excavation for the trap.	1,690	1,000 minor players	1,725
Iron framework for cathedral doors	1,250	Orchestra of 200	950
Electric installation apparatus	3,000	Boys and girls	115
Electric wiring & fixing	1,500	Girl dancers	175
Use of organ	1,000	Total (approximately, for eight weeks' run)	40,000 pounds.

46 See Cheney, S., Stage Decoration, plate 76. (Also Webster, M. p. 64)

47 Carter, H., opp. p. 240.

> When Hamlet started on a stage occupying the centre of the arena and the actors, dressed in modern garb, leaned against the railings of the boxes, the spectators began to look around excitedly, trying in vain to recognize among the gentlemen in evening clothes the performer Moissi as Hamlet. [48]

Reinhardt built his productions much as a symphonic conductor directs a symphony. Great attention is paid to rhythm, tonal quality, expression, and the building of climaxes; but where the musician's materials are violins, bassoons, and timpanis, Reinhardt's are colour, light, and the movement and voices of actors on a stage. In the results of both there is a tremendous emotional impact upon the audience.

Other German régisseurs adopted Reinhardt's methods; but whether they espoused the new movement in the theatre, or clung to the old, productions of Shakespere, and particularly of Hamlet were popular throughout Germany.

> The highest general level of theatrical production in the modern theatre was reached in Germany from 1900 to 1914 and continued for some years after the close of the World War. It was made possible by the fact that every large city was a self-sufficient centre of theatrical culture. Munich, Stuttgart, Dresden, Darmstadt, Leipzig, Cologne, Bremen, or even such small cities as Weimar, Posen, and Stettin, did not wait for Berlin to ship them whatever shop-worn success it could spare, but built superbly equipped theatres that were civic monuments. [49]

In France, the man who is chiefly noted as a disciple of the new movement is Jacques Copeau. He is credited by McGowan and Jones

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48 Bab, Julius, "The Theatre in the German Language Area Since the World War", The Theatre in a Changing Europe, p. 160.

49 Simonson, Lee, pp. 402-3.

as being the creator of the first presentational playhouse in the modern world.[50] It is the Vieux-Colombier in Paris, established by Copeau a few years before the opening of World War I, as the theatre for the company of actors he had trained. The physical structure of Copeau's stage created a stir of comment when he first used it. There was no proscenium arch, there were no footlights, and the stage floo r was connected with the auditorium floor by three wide curved steps. No attempt w as made to hide the source of illumination; it came from two lantern-shaped fixtures, one hung on each side of the stage. This stage, then, bears many similarities to that of the Globe or any Elizabethan playhouse, having a balcony, a forestage and a main stage. Here, Hamlet could be produced much as it was in Shakespere's day. A world of difference, however, was in the interpretation of the play by Frenchmen of a pre-war and post-war period.

Another theatre in France of the presentational type was copied after Reinhardt's circus theatres. A description of a production of Hamlet in the Cirque Medrano in Paris, gives us a hint of the possibilities of staging offered by this theatre.

> The Ghost scene in Hamlet? Imagine the sentinel's companions moonlit in the centre. Imagine a gallery behind the arches lighted with a dim and ghostly radiance. And imagine Marcellus suddenly and fearfully pointing to the figure of the dead man where it moves above the last row of spectators. No mixing of actors and audience, but what a thrill to see the ghost across a gulf of turned and straining faces, what a horror to see him over your own shoulder! [51]

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50 McGowan and Jones, p. 172.

51 Ibid, p. 208.

What has been given here is by no means a comprehensive study of the treatment and production of Shakespere's Hamlet on the Continent. It serves the purpose, however, of illustrating the fact that the European theatre is eager to try out new methods of staging, and is making great headway with these new methods. It is significant that of English tragic drama, Hamlet is often chosen for production. The many facets of the leading character's personality offer as much variety of interpretation as the many facets of the play itself. For English and American producers -- and particularly for English producers, there's a divinity that doth hedge the play, and Hamlet is invariably given a "straight" interpretation. And so the English stage has been slow in adopting the new methods of staging.

> The English theatre at the present time is displaying a strange lack of inventiveness and initiativeness ... we are content to drift aimlessly on .... No art may flourish so long as it remains stagnant. Experimentation spells movement at least, and the English theatre, lacking the spirit for experimentation, is artistically and mentally moribund. Momentary flashes of life simply serve to emphasize the debility of the rest. [52]

There is one respect, however, in which the English theatre has not been stagnant, and that is in contributing great actors of consummate skill. The finest Hamlets of our age are Englishmen: John Gielgud and Maurice Evans. America, on the other hand, has adopted widely progressive ideas of staging, and all the modern trends are represented on the American stage. It is not always the commercial stage on which these ideas are

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52 Nicoll, Allardyce, The English Theatre, p. 188

put into practice. The amateur stage of universities, little theatres, and summer stock companies and schools have had the opportunities of interpretation allowed by an independence of the box office.

Since the new movement did not make itself felt in the American theatre until the early 1920's, productions of Hamlet before that time have no place in this study. In 1922, however, there appeared on the New York stage a Hamlet that somewhat startled American playgoers. John Barrymore played the title role, Arthur Hopkins was the director, and the sets and costumes were designed by Robert Edmond Jones. Something contributed by each of these men to the production accounted for its "startling" results. In the first place, Barrymore discarded the acting traditions which had surrounded the role for decades, and instead, he played a Hamlet that, according to the critics, was entirely his own.[53] He gave Hamlet an austerity and detachment that removed him not only from the audience's understanding, but also from their appreciation. He was a tortured soul whose delineation was more in the nature of a psycho-analytic study, than a dramatic portrayal of the role. Barrymore's method of delivery was somewhat slow, and this, too, detracted from the success of his interpretation. It was, however, an intelligent and moving performance.

Secondly, the director-producer, Hopkins, had introduced several innovations. The Ghost, for instance, was never seen; instead, his presence was suggested by a shaft of light coming from offstage. In

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53 Moses & Brown, The American Theatre: 1752-1934, New York, 1934, p.119.

one scene he appears as a projected figure thrown across the sky. [54] Hopkins, too, may have been responsible for the slow pacing of the play. It was the Jones set, however, that created the most comment. A permanent stage setting was used, consisting of a flight of broad steps that extended almost the width of the stage, leading to a lofty doorway at back centre. A draped curtain fitted this Romanesque arch, and the royal thrones were set in front of it. A front curtain was dropped for one or two scenes played just outside the proscenium. Apart from the use of the front curtain, the stage was frankly architectural, and mood and place of the various scenes were indicated by light changes and the placing of simple properties.

> I choose light (Jones says) not only to bring out elements of "character" by a slightly unfamiliar color and value just below the threshold of conscious appreciation, but also to make the players swim in a luminous, shadowless aether, the ideal poetic atmosphere. They exist, so to speak, self-luminous and radiant -- important, heroic. [55]

One reviewer, J. Ranken Towse, of the New York Evening Post, did not like this production of Hamlet. He identifies himself as a traditionalist when he speaks of Hopkins being "infected with some of the pernicious theories of Gordon Craig." He declares further that "to attempt to modernize Shakespeare .... is not only futile, but something worse than foolish." The staging he describes as being spectacular, delaying and confusing the action, rather than expediting it. He refers to the ghost as an "incandescent comet", and sums up

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54 Theatre Arts, VII, i, p. 43.

55 Sayler, O.M., Our American Theatre, New York, 1923, p. 158.

this innovation with the words, "Art, forsooth.' It was barbarous and childish." [56] Mr. Towse was the writer of a volume published several years earlier, entitled, Sixty Years In the Theatre; those sixty years and more had so conditioned the writer, presumably, that he was one old dog who could not be taught new tricks. His opinions were not shared by the majority of the critics: a letter from London to the Theatre Arts Magazine mentions the critics' agreement that "Mr. Jones setting has made it the most beautiful production of Hamlet that New York has ever had." [57] John Mason Brown speaks of "the Hamlet John Barrymore once ignited with the fire of genius"; [58] Stark Young wrote: "John Barrymore seemed to gather together in himself all the Hamlets of his generation." [59]

Nine years later, American audiences witnessed a production of Hamlet that was even more startling to certain of the theatre's critics than the Barrymore-Hopkins-Jones production had been to J. Ranken Towse. It was Norman Bel Geddes' presentation of Shakespere's tragedy, and the part of the Prince was played by Raymond Massey. Geddes, who was not only designer, but also the director of the play, used a single permanent setting of four principal levels, beginning approximately at the proscenium line, from which an apron spilled over fifteen feet into the orchestra. Scenery and properties were reduced to a minimum and no furniture whatsoever was used.

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56 Moses and Brown, The American Theatre, 1752-1934, pp. 118-122.

57 Theatre Arts, Ix, xi, p. 338.

58 Brown, J.M., Two On the Aisle, p. 58.

59 Young, Stark, Theatre Arts, XII, xii, p. 982.

> A single small platform, for instance, was used successively for a throne, for the couch in the chamber scene, and the grave of Ophelia's burial. In the latter scene also, the churchyard was suggested by no more than eight crosses set up on various levels. From any one of the eleven points of entrance and exit, it was no more than six steps to the centre of the stage. -- All this was the evidence that Mr. Geddes intended to turn over the stage to the actors, to give them every opportunity to act out the tragedy to the full measure of its continuity. [60]

One of Mr. Geddes' chief aims was the banishing of long scene waits which interrupt the fluidity of the drama. "This stage," he said, "has been designed in no sense from a pictorial standpoint, but entirely from the requirements of acting the scenes in the most forceful way." [61] Another aim was to preserve the unity of the play and of the production, and he followed Gordon Craig's precept of "one boss" by designing the lighting and costume as well. On such a stage, the lighting is vastly important, since the mood, as well as the change of scene is effected by it. The costumes of the Geddes' production were very simple, strong in colour, and stood out in fine contrast against the grayish monotone of the setting.

Technically, the production was a triumph; it had a sweep and scope hitherto not given to modern productions of the play. Rays of carefully circumscribed light picked out the various platea, and the action switched from, -- to give an example -- Act I, Scene 3 in Polonius' house to the next scene in the act, all in the twinkling of an eye. This was accomplished simply by focusing the light first on one level,

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60 Hutchens, J. "Broadway in Review", Theatre Arts, XVI, i, p. 16.

61 Geddes, N.B., Theatre Arts, XX, x, p. 778.

and then on another; any simple properties were set out in the darkness of an unused part of the stage, while the audience's attention was concentrated on the lighted area. Unfortunately, however, the production fell short of its aim in two ways: direction, and acting. Perhaps Mr. Geddes approached Shakespere's script too much as a technician, a technician lacking a certain sensitivity to Shakespere's poetic diction. As John Hutchens points out in his review of the production, "the poetry of the play was not allowed to come through." [62] This verdict is borne out by John Mason Brown who writes:

> He cuts unsparingly and surprisingly. He omits Fortinbras .... He slices familiar speeches in two. He discards Osric. He overlooks the trip to England. He does not prepare for the poisoned foils. He blue-pencils at least one of the most time-honored wheezes of the grave-diggers, and in general boils the play down to its melodramatic bone by stressing its action and minimizing both its poetry and its subtlety. [63]

The innovation of presenting the ghost objectively, but of having Hamlet speak his father's lines, was not particularly happy, since it reduced the effectiveness of Hamlet's reaction to the Ghost's speeches. Shakespere, himself, is reported to have played the part of the Ghost, and if he did so, the inference is that he considered the role an important one within the pattern of the drama. It is doubtful whether he would have approved of this handling of the part.

And finally, Geddes was unfortunate in his selection of actors who were to "act the scenes in the most forceful way". As a group, they

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62 Hutchens, J. Theatre Arts, XVI, i, p. 17.

63 Brown, J.M., Two On The Aisle, p. 56.

exhibited the various degrees of good, bad, and indifferent acting that mark so many productions. Raymond Massey, as Hamlet, was un able to offset his physical unsuitability to the part by a skilful handling of Shakespere's lines. His voice lacked the range and warmth demanded by the part, and in an effort to keep up with the speed of the production he jumbled and mouthed speeches. He "had moments"; but these were not sustained, and Brown calls him "every other inch a Hamlet", while reference is made by another critic to the childish hysteria he substituted for passion and the impression he gave the audience of Hamlet as a baffled juvenile, "but never a man caught in the tragic dilemma between thought and action." [64] Some reason for the inconsistency and disjointedness of Massey's performance might be found in Geddes' arbitrary cutting of the text.

Norman Bel Geddes' production of Hamlet was far more than an experiment; it was a challenge to other producers. It had restored a measure of the intimacy between actor and audience, and in doing so, had put new life into the play. That it was not wholly successful is unimportant; it has pointed the way to other producers in America and in other lands.

> It was a production as haunting and beautiful as his far-reaching imagination could make it, and as stunning in its simplicity as the form in which that vision takes on reality. There have been few moments in our theatre so touched with expectation as that in which the curtains of this production parted on the high parapet all gray and misty in the chill midnight and seemed to summon all the beauty and exaltation that lay beyond. [65]

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64 Hutchens, J., Theatre Arts, XVI, i, p. 18.

65 Ibid, p. 17.

A conscientious artist of the theatre who has a long list of personal triumphs to his credit, is the English actor, John Gielgud. He has maintained a family theatrical tradition, for his great aunt was Ellen Terry. More specifically, he has maintained a tradition of fine Shakesperian acting. To this tradition he brought a magnificent voice and diction as well as a sincere and painstaking interest in his art. Gielgud had played Hamlet many times at the Old Vic in London, and in 1938 gave an open air performance at Elsinore in Denmark, with ancient Kronberg castle as a background. This elicited paeans of praise from Danish and German critics, one of whom called him the finest actor who had ever played the part. [66] But the production that offers the most material for comparison here is that presented by Gielgud in New York in 1936.

A very complete and intensely interesting account of this production is given in a book by Rosamond Gilder, John Gielgud's "Hamlet". In the foreword Miss Gilder comments on the sore lack of adequate records of individual performances; she bemoans this lack because she sees in such records revealing commentaries and interpretations of the text. The aim of her book is to make up, in part, this lack -- and the aim is accomplished. Mr. Gielgud's own analysis of the presentation is wonderfully illuminating, and he shows himself to be refreshingly honest about his work. In his notes on the production which are included in the book, he writes:

> I have spoken a great deal in these notes about stage business and the Victorian and Edwardian traditions of Shakespeare which I deplore in the theatre.

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66 Gilder, R. Theatre Arts, XXIII, x, pp. 709-11.

> At the same time I know only too well that my own performance has been cluttered with these things. I have never been either sufficiently experienced or sufficiently original to dare to direct or play Hamlet without including a great deal of this kind of theatricalism for fear of being unable to hold the interest of the audience by a more classical and simple statement of the written text. As in music, it needs the greatest artist to perform most simply and perfectly the greatest composition. [67]

One example of this theatricalism is the breaking of the recorder at the end of the playscene and the handing of the pieces, one to Rosencrantz, one to Guildenstern. Gielgud took this piece of business from Sir Henry Irving, and was advised by Sir Philip Ben Greet to delete it from his performance. "I replied, undaunted, that it was the most effective piece of business in the play and that people always liked it." And then he adds ruefully, "I fear I am an inveterate ham, and shall never be the conscientious interpreter of Shakespeare that I should like to be." [68]

It is the honesty of Gielgud's approach to the part, and the awareness of his own limitations that have made his Hamlet a sincere, and, therefore, because he is also a great artist, profoundly moving and inspired portrayal. Evidence of this honesty is in his words, "The advice to the players is always slightly embarassing for the actor, because he feels the audience is only waiting to catch him doing all the things he has told the players not to do." [69] Later he refers to the

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67 Gilder, R. John Gielgud's Hamlet, New York, 1937, p. 54.

68 Ibid, p. 59.

69 Ibid, p. 57.

great possibilities for pictorial effects in the duel scene of the last act. "As I am not a good swordsman, I have never myself attempted more than is absolutely necessary. Frankly, also, I haven't the energy for it at the end of such a long and exhausting part." [70]

Mr. Gielgud is quoted extensively here because, more than any of the actors discussed in this chapter, he can project his feelings concerning the production of Hamlet on paper, just as he could project the character of Hamlet across the footlights. What he writes in Rosamond Gilder's book, as well as his comments on his recent production of Macbeth [71] reveal a tremendous sensitivity to colour and motion on the stage, and above all, to the tableau effect achieved by the actors against an appropriately interpretative background. He describes how Moissi, the German actor who toured England and America in 1929, staged the last act, and criticizes it as being too much of a stunt.

> I prefer my own arrangement of the scene, in which the Queen and Laertes died on big thrones, one on each side of the stage close to the footlights, and the King in a big cloak and crown was pursued up to a centre platform where he fell in a swirl of red folds. There were still steps below for Hamlet and Horatio to play their final scene, and Fortinbras and his army in grey cloaks and banners came from over a kind of battlement and dipped their flags at the final curtain. [72]

The settings for this production were designed by Jo Mielziner. A semi-permanent or unit setting, it was ingeniously adaptable to the demands of seven separate "built" scenes. A stylized effect was achieved

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70 Ibid, p. 70.

71 Gielgud, John, "Before Macbeth", Theatre Arts, XXVI, ii, pp. 113-117.

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largely by an almost completely symmetrical arrangement of setting. The stage was divided into two main levels, the upper one being six feet above the main stage, and reached by steps from the left and the right. This arrangement formed, as it were, the landing and nether flights of a grand Y-shaped staircase. In the sentinel's platform and graveyard scenes, two turrets, one at the right, one at the left, formed the background; between them was a dark sky. In the great hall scenes, semi-circular walls enclosed the huge room, and the battlements could be seen at the top.

The dividing of the forestage and backstage was done by a backdrop just at the line where the steps begin to rise to the upper stage. The first two steps of each flight became, instead, the approach to a doorway left, and one right. This front half of the stage was used in such scenes as the royal council chamber, the king's and the queen's apartments. And finally, the graveyard scene is almost identical with that of the sentinel's platform, but there is the addition of a flying buttress and a cross to one of the turrets, thereby suggesting a church. Some of the shorter scenes were played before the front curtain -- the plain in Denmark, a corridor in the castle, Polonius' house.

Of scenery for the play Gielgud writes:

> It is important .... that the sense of pictorial richness and sensuous decadence of a Renaissance court should be somehow combined and contrasted with the feeling of a "war-like state", where ghosts and horror haunt the battlements by night; where armies are marshalling for war, graves give up their dead and a barbaric Northern feeling of cold and grimness cuts across the luxurious court life of the murderous poisoner and his shallow queen. [73]

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73 Ibid, p. 33.

The costumes, also designed by Mielziner, were of the Sixteenth century design which John Mason Brown described as "Vandyke". Gielgud states three essentials for the Prince's costume: it must be flattering, loose, and comfortable. "I feel the Renaissance costume suggests the scholar, the poet, the prince, the courtier, and the gentleman." Historically accurate costumes of the period of the play's story he found to be unwieldy, in the case of the men, and unattractive for the women. Rich colours were used for all the court characters, except Gielgud, whose costumes throughout the play were black, and who made effective use of capes and cloaks. [74]

This production of Hamlet brought forth loud acclaim in the public press, no fewer than fourteen articles being written in praise of it. [75] Edith Isaacs refers to the aspiration behind the production,"the obvious will of everybody concerned in the making of the show to add to its sum the best of what he has to give." [76] Undoubtedly, Guthrie McClintic's direction was responsible for some of this. One of his innovations is the treatment of the Ghost; this did not satisfy Mr. Gielgud, and indeed, he confessed that he had never seen the part played entirely to his satisfaction. In this production, however, the silent figure of the Ghost walked on the stage, while Malcolm Keen, who also played the part of Claudius, spoke the Ghost's lines into a microphone, and the voice

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74 Ibid, p. 21.

75 Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, July 1935 - June 1937, p. 1657.

76 Isaacs, E.J.R. "Broadway In Review", Theatre Arts, XX, xi, p. 843.

was amplified by loudspeakers throughout the auditorium. Both Mr. McClintic and Mr. Gielgud were dissatisfied with this method, since the audience could not be held by the Ghost's long speeches,and they changed it later to one whereby the Ghost's lines were spoken from the wings.

It was John Gielgud's interpretation of Hamlet that attracted most attention, however. He admits himself to have been torn between the desire to "walk in the traditions of the great ones," and to create an interpretation that was justly his own. Most critics agree that he accomplished the latter; but this conflict of aims may account for John Mason Brown's criticism that Gielgud's Hamlet was inconsistent, and that it was "more mercurial than was good for it." [77] The actor writes that the performance satisfied him only spasmodically and that "the only really original contribution that I have made to the history of the part has been to play it successfully when I was younger than most Hamlets have been." [78]

Here, however, is where the critics do not agree. Edith Isaacs emphasizes his remarkable feeling for the poetic value of Shakespere's words; he is an actor-poet with a rare gift of projecting his feelings across the footlights, realizing "superb, and superbly simple climaxes." [79] John Mason Brown mentions Gielgud's flexibility of voice, movement, and facial expression. "He turns the searchlight of his thinking and his feeling on sentence after sentence which gains new force and meaning

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77 Brown, J.M., Two On the Aisle, p. 50.

78 Gilder, R., p. 72.

79 Isaacs, E.J.R., "Broadway in Review," Theatre Arts, XX, xi, p. 842.

because of what he finds in it to reveal." Rosamond Gilder discusses the subtlety of his acting technique, his ability to handle words --"he can fence with words as lightly and humorously as he can bludgeon with them." [80] Two characteristics of his acting she picks out as being his "ever-renewed freshness of attack," and his ability to listen to others on the stage. She, like all the critics, refers to the range and quality of his voice which she calls "the supreme weapon in the actor's arsenal." It can be assumed safely, then, that John Gielgud has made a place for himself in the history of the greatest role in English drama, and that his interpretation was one of profound distinction and beauty.

The same year, a second production of Hamlet was seen on Broadway. It was that of Leslie Howard, with very effective and elaborate stage settings designed by Stewart Chaney. The jump from Hollywood to Elsinore was one too long for Mr. Howard, and his performance served chiefly as one, (and a bad one at that) by which to hold up John Gielgud's. Perhaps the best and briefest way to describe this production is to quote the heading John Mason Brown gives his review of it in Two On the Aisle; it is "Hamlet as Leslie Howard". [81]

The most recent production of Hamlet in America to attract nation-wide attention and acclaim is that of Maurice Evans and with Margaret Webster as director. It is generally felt that the work of Miss Webster was as much responsible for the high quality of the production as was

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80 Gilder, R., p. 19.

81 Brown, J.M., Two On the Aisle, p. 52.
See also, E.J.R. Isaacs, "Broadway in Review", Theatre Arts, XXI, i, 97

Mr. Evans' splendid interpretation of the leading role. To the history of the play in the American theatre, this performance added another "first", and the playbill reads: "Maurice Evans presents for the first time in New York, Shakespeare's Hamlet in its entirety, directed by Margaret Webster." The significant words are, "in its entirety", for, although the tendency had been towards presenting fuller texts such as Mr. Gielgud used, and such as are the rule at the Old Vic, America had never seen the complete play performed. Originally the intention of the director and producer was to play half of the performances in the "cut" version, and the other half in the complete version.

> But the demand to see the play that Shakespeare wrote and the response of the public towards it, cause him (Mr. Evans) to drop all cut performances and concentrate exclusively on the full text. The play was the thing. [82]

It was in presenting the play uncut that this production gained its greatest force. To some, perhaps, it was just a novelty -- these Shakespere might have labelled "the injudicious". Most playgoers, however, and doubtless all of the critics, realized that the use of the full text contributed greatly to the lucidity of the story, and therefore to the character of Hamlet, himself. It gave the production a balance usually lacking in presentations in which the other characters are not presented in full. Playgoers lacking a reading knowledge of the play, and hitherto confused at the hints of court intrigue, the nature of the King's ambition, and only vaguely aware of Fortinbras and the fates of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, had a picture puzzle with several pieces missing. In seeing

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82 Webster, Margaret, p. 217.

the Webster-Evans Hamlet they were able to fit in the missing pieces, and they found Hamlet -- to use Miss Webster's term -- "bewilderingly unbewildering". Playgoers, then, bowed not once, but twice to the author of the play, and realized, in many cases for a first time, that Shakespere knew what best to say and how and when to say it. And so the production was a personal triumph not only for Maurice Evans and Margaret Webster, but for William Shakespere as well.

The settings and costumes for this production were the work of the young English designer, David Ffolkes. [*] The set was semi-permanent, with several acting levels. It was more closely allied to the picture stage than to an architectural stage, however, and compared to the settings of the three productions already described; its scene changes were moderately elaborate. Several short scenes were played before the front curtain. A small apron projected into the orchestra pit; on either side of it were flights of steps which allowed satisfactory entrances and exits. Here the soliloquies were spoken, and a measure of intimacy between actors and audience was established. The application of the principle of unit setting helped to unify the play, as well as expedite it; but it could have contributed even more to that aim, had fewer locales been represented. Polonius' house, for example, was a complete set in the forestage. The atmosphere of regal splendour of the Danish court was suggested by rich hangings, gilt trimmings; while the apartments of the King and of the Queen strongly emphasized the sensual character of their owners. Gertrude's bed was hung in velvet of rich purple, blues, and red, with gilt cupids holding the folds of the drapes.

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[*] David Ffolkes is now reported missing in the R.A.F. since the fall of

The costumes, too, were rich in colour and atmospheric detail. They were designed by Ffolkes in the infinite variety offered by the Elizabethan period, and echoed the personalities of the characters who wore them. The most striking of Hamlet's costumes was that of the last act, after his return from England. He was clad very simply in gray -- a colour which seemed to suggest a certain change in Hamlet's character -- the integrated personality of a man who has faced a conflict and reached his decision. The Queen was gowned in rich blues, red, and golds which accentuated her voluptuousness. In the earlier scenes, Ophelia was dressed in an ivory-coloured gown of simple design, while in her mad scene she appeared in a wispy black costume which made her seem to float or drift rather than walk, giving her an other-worldly look which greatly heightened the effectiveness of her playing.

The description of the setting and costumes given here is apt to be misleading in that it tends to emphasize elaborate and sumptuous details. Actually, this aspect of the production did not overbalance the acting or the play itself; rather, they were quite in keeping with the interpretation of the play as a whole. The playgoer, when in the theatre, was aware only subconsciously perhaps, of the effect created by sets and costumes; conscious appreciation of them comes later with the perusal of photographs and sketches, and the reading of descriptions of that production.

In an article entitled, "Shakespeare's Man", Maurice Evans states a further aim in producing Hamlet. "Miss Webster and I have tried to keep our production forthright and simple without being effectedly Elizabethan."[83]

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83 Strauss, Theodore, "Maurice Evans: Shakespeare's Man", Theatre Arts, XXVI, iii, p.163.

Margaret Webster corroborates this by saying,

> It was our intention to bring the play close to its hearers, even to lead them by inference to believe that in this palace of Elsinore people led everyday lives much like their own, ate and slept and dressed and listened to music and took an interest in the theatre and in the skill of riding and horsemanship. Behind this façade of familiar things moves the spiritual pulse and emotional conflict of the play. [84]

This, perhaps, explains Evans' interpretation of the part in contrast with that of Gielgud's. In an interview with Time Magazine, Mr. Evans said that he did not want to portray Hamlet as a "dyspeptic prince", but as a healthy extrovert caught in a net of overwhelming and tragic circumstances. In doing so, lies the reason for his uncommon success in the role; there, also, lies the reason he failed to express the more subtle side of Hamlet's character. "For thence a paradox ...." although Gielgud's interpretation was more profound, more subtle, it earned (in some quarters) the epithet, "neurotic". Evans' interpretation, being less subtle, less profound, earned the acclaim of the majority of playgoers, who are, after all, ordinary people easily puzzled and perplexed by profundities. Both actors, then, succeeded in carrying out the aims they held for the part; Evans had a greater measure of popular success than Gielgud, who, in turn enjoyed a greater artistic success.

Fortunately for the production and for himself, Maurice Evans did not overdo his "extroverted" theme. His portrayal of the Prince was hailed as "a remarkably beautiful achievement", [85] "one of the great

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[84] Webster, Margaret, p. 128.

[85] George Jean Nathan, in Newsweek.

and satisfying events of the modern theatre", [86] while John Mason Brown opened all the stops of praise, and called him "the finest actor of our day."

> The Hamlet Mr. Evans plays, in colors unorthodox in their gaiety, is not outwardly the melancholy Dane we have come to expect. His sadness is in his heart rather than on his face. At the outset he may seem to be uncerebral, but the proofs of his thinking are constant and stimulating. Unlike most recent Hamlets, Mr. Evans is not a neurotic princeling with a pale visage who strikes despairing poses under spotlights. He is the first entirely masculine Hamlet of our time. He has wit, gaiety, vitality, and charm. Watching him, one understands what the King means when he describes Hamlet's spirit as being 'free and generous': why dueling would be something at which he excels; and why Fortinbras insists after his death that 'the rites of war speak loudly for him' ... His voice is a beautiful instrument, capable of doing justice to the magnificent beauty of the lines he speaks ... This man Evans is a superlative performer, a genius the stage is fortunate in claiming as its own. [87]

Margaret Webster, as director, showed an uncanny ability of keeping a large number of characters moving on the stage without detracting from the main characters and what they had to say. An example of this was in the court scene of Act I, where the King instructs his counsellors who are seated at a table at the stage right. The King and Queen are on a dais a little to the left of centre stage. Behind them, examining silks and materials are the Queen's ladies who confer with her on the quality of this or that piece of goods. This treatment gave tremendous life to the scene, still without distracting the audience from attending to the dialogue. It succeeded in doing this perhaps

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86 Richard Watts, jr., in New York Herald Tribune.

87 Brown, J. M., "Maurice Evans as Hamlet", The New York Post, October 13, 1938.

because Miss Webster insists on each "super" visualizing himself or herself as a particular character, and sustaining that characterization even if no lines accompany the part.

In keeping with this straightforward interpretation of the play, the Ghost was played simply and directly; he was not a shaft of light, an amplified voice, or a soundless character whose words were spoken by Hamlet. Instead, he appeared, in

"the very armour he had on
When he th'ambitious Norway combated."

Miss Webster said of this production, "We aimed at certain specific values which seemed to us to have been obscured in the course of time, and these were not abstract but concrete." [88] These aims, as we have seen, were the humanizing of the characters, and an attempt to make them more understandable to their hearers. An aid in this was the use of the full text. "The aim of Mr. Evans' productions," she writes, "has been a collaboration with both author and audience. We have tried honestly to interpret the author's intention as nearly as we could divine it." [89] The reviews of the critics would indicate that her aims were realized.

Great interest has been shown in modern dress versions of Shakespere's plays. The Mercury Theatre, under the direction of Orson Welles gave an exciting interpretation of Julius Caesar with Caesar closely resembling a well-known modern dictator, and his followers garbed as

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88 Webster, M. p. 218.

89 Webster, M. p. 9.

Storm Troopers. "The antique Rome which we had thought was securely Roman in Shakespeare's tragedy, Mr. Welles shows us to be a dateless state of mind." [90] This was undoubtedly doing Shakespere a favour; Julius Caesar, long the favourite of English teachers, and murdered more surely by them than by Brutus, needed enlivening. Hamlet, however, does not need it, and, at the same time, offers more obstacles to the producer who attempts a modern dress version of it. The closet scene, for instance, and the killing of Polonius represents one difficulty. Today, a sword is an anachronism, and while the duel scene could be easily managed,in others we would expect Hamlet to carry a revolver, and not a sword. Again, it is questionable whether in our day we would expect a man of Hamlet's nature to carry a revolver, while its equivalent, the sword, was a regular accoutrement of an Elizabethan gentleman. There is, too, the danger of the novelty of the production overbalancing its effect as drama.

These obstacles have been challenged, and, in some cases, surmounted, by producers of Hamlet in modern dress. One of these was Sir Barry Jackson, who, in 1925 at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, put into Hamlet's hands a cigarette instead of a snuff box. A simple architectural setting was used throughout, and in the play scene, the courtiers in "tails" and tuxedos surround the King and Queen, while Hamlet, in protestation of such light conduct following on the heels of his father's death, refuses to conform and wears a business suit. Coffee and liqueurs

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90 Brown, J.M., Two On the Aisle, p. 40.

are sipped by the courtiers, and the king, rattled by the Mousetrap play, automatically lights a cigarette to hide his nervousness. In the graveyard scenes, Hamlet wears a sports suit of "plus fours" which are in strange contrast to the mourning clothes of the funeral cortège. John Gielgud mentions the "unbearable impressiveness" of this scene, the black, brass-handled coffin coming a little too close to bleak reality. [91] Sir Cedric Hardwicke was the First Gravedigger and gave a brilliant performance that foretold future triumphs on the stage. "Because of the youthful, dignified performance of Colin Keith-Johnson as Hamlet," writes a reviewer, "the modernized version of the tragedy became something more significant than a mere bid for publicity." [92] Therein lies the danger in modern dress productions of Hamlet.

Another production that is out of the ordinary is one given at the Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow in 1932. [93] To call the production "out of the ordinary" is to use understatement; it was completely unorthodox, in interpretation and in acting. It was not a question of taking liberties with the text -- the text, the plot, and all the usual characterizations were pushed aside and supplanted by others. The production, nevertheless, is a testimony to the wealth of interpretations offered by Hamlet's character.

Hamlet, in this production, instead of being the romantic young prince, in appearance at least, was a squat, jovial fellow, Holbeinesque

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91 Gilder, R., p. 68.

92 Theatre Arts, IX, xi, pp. 755-6.

93 All material for this production is taken from the article by Mordecai Gorelik, "The Horses of Hamlet", in Theatre Arts, XVI, viii, pp. 883-7.

in his aspect. The problem of the Ghost is one which worried him little, for he invented it himself; he and Horatio are conducting a whispering campaign against the King, and the Ghost is one of their weapons. To strengthen this campaign, Hamlet masquerades before his uncle's soldiers as his father's ghost. Later, Horatio, who is a bookish, bespectacled young man, muffles his voice in a butter tub to convince the quaking guards that the ghost is not just "a pleasing shape" they have imagined. Having set in motion their plot to reclaim the throne of Denmark for Hamlet, the Prince and Horatio return to their scientific research. It is in their laboratory that they philosophize over Yorick's skull; the graveyard scene is omitted entirely.

The most famous of the soliloquies is given in a tavern, and Hamlet, his crown set at a rakish angle, and clutching the handle of a beer stein, utters the words (or their Russian equivalent) "To be or not to be ..." The players' scene is very effective when the King, followed by the Queen, races down the long flight of steps which are at the dead centre of the stage, hotly pursued by Hamlet, to the shouts of "lights, lights!" In another scene, Hamlet enters the market place, clad in a nightgown with an inverted saucepan on his head and brandishing a carrot. This public exhibition of his feigned madness is another link in the plot to overthrow the King by deluding him and his followers. The King is a monkeyish creature, a figure of ridicule, representing abhorred power, while Hamlet, in opposing him, might be taken as a Bolshevist.[94] Ophelia does not

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94 Dickenson, T.H., p. 84.

escape transformation; she is a buxom young creature who could not, by the widest stretch of the imagination, be the type to pine and finally commit suicide for unrequited love. Instead, she takes to drink, and appears on the stage carried around on the shoulders of her admirers, of whom she has many. She drowns while still "in her cups" after a Bacchanalian revel with her devoted swains.

The costumes, like the setting, are stylized to the point of grotesqueness. In one scene Hamlet, dressed in black coat and breeches, wore a tall stove-pipe hat to which was attached a long black mourning veil. Several of the characters make their entrances on horseback -- sometimes the horses are real, sometimes they are only papier-maché.

This production seemed to poke fun at itself as well as at the human race in general. But, comments Mordecai Gorelik, "With so many horses to sit on, this Hamlet falls to the ground." For Hamlet was still Hamlet, and the thoughtful and sensitive side of his nature still had to be portrayed even when in gross disharmony with the rest of the production.

After the presentation of a particularly unsuccessful production of Hamlet, one long-suffering critic wrote rather wearily that the much disputed Bacon-Shakespere question could have been settled for once and for all during that performance. The disputants had only to open up both graves, and whichever was whirling madly, Bacon or Shakespere, that man had written the plays!

There may have been something in each of these production, as well as in many others not discussed here, to make Shakespere turn; some may have made him whirl, others, turn just once. In each of them, however, there is something which might make him nod his head in approval.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

"Given half a chance," writes Margaret Webster, "Shakespeare will still bind an audience with the old irresistable spell. There is much in him that you simply cannot destroy however hard you try."[1] The implication is not that a producer, actor, or director coldbloodedly sets himself to destroy Shakespere on the stage; the destruction is done unwittingly, and usually with the best of intentions. What is damned by some as destruction, however, is often hailed by others as re-creation, and the producer must always bow to the dictum,"One man's meat is another man's poison."

In attempting to assess the values offered by this or that type of production, the danger lies in confusing achievements in terms of the producers' aims, with results, in terms of the audience's reactions to those achievements. It has been seen that a producer may have certain aims for his production, but the audience may misinterpret those aims. Or again, the aims may be properly interpreted by the audience, but not receive their approval. The four main productions of Hamlet studied here, the Barrymore, the Massey, the Gielgud, and the Evans Hamlets, - each offers a case in point.

The Barrymore-Hopkins-Jones Hamlet is significant because it broke the vessel of tradition, both in its staging and in the interpretation of the leading role. In doing so, there were disadvantages

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1 Webster, M., Shakespeare Without Tears. p. 15.

as well as advantages. People expected a certain type of setting to be designed for Hamlet, and one of the reactions to Jones' setting was, why, you can't do this to Shakespere! But Jones did it, nevertheless, and his architectural stage imparted a new unity to that production, a unity unobtainable with the use of several completely changed sets. But one flaw is apparent, not in the theory underlying Jones' architectural setting, but in the practice of it. The flight of wide steps topped by a draped Romanesque arch was too specific a locality to be considered of a neutral background. Had it either allowed for the introduction of simple changes, as Copeau's stage did, or been less of an identified background, it would have contributed more to the production, or rather, detracted less from it. As it was, the effect tended to be monotonous.[2] O. M. Sayler describes it as being "too rigidly confining". The Bel Geddes setting, on the other hand, succeeded where the Jones setting failed. Being a less obtrusive background, it was more adaptable, and because it was adaptable, it was not monotonous.

John Barrymore's portrayal of Hamlet marked the beginning of a new trend in acting Shakespere's plays. There was a conscious effort to get away from "ham" acting, and from the idea of a leading man bearing almost the entire burden of the acting, as well as the more welcome onus of all the credit if the production were a success. The very fact that his presentation is referred to as "the Jones-Barrymore," or "the Barrymore-Hopkins-Jones" production illustrates this point. No one speaks of the designer of the Irving or the Forbes-Robertson, Hamlet. The influence,

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[2] Sayler, O. M., Our American Theatre, N. Y., 1923, p. 157.

then, had come to rest on the production as an integrated whole. The ideas of the designer, director, and performer had been fused to bring about a unified impression.

The Bel Geddes production of Hamlet shared some of the same disadvantages as that done by Barrymore and Jones. It was an innovation, and as such, was in danger of being labelled as a "stunt" production. That it was no labelled so was due to Mr. Geddes intelligent handling of his medium, and his sincere desire to interpret the play with some of the speed and force it had been given in Elizabethan days. The production was unfortunate in its leading actor, and an old truth was emphasized - that the role of Hamlet, while it brings the richest rewards if done well, reaps an immense harvest of criticism if it is not. The demands of the role, as extensive as they are exacting, were too much for Raymond Massey. In all fairness to Mr. Massey, however, it should be pointed out that the very nature of the production placed an added burden on his role, focusing as it did, all attention on him.

John Gielgud's interpretation of Hamlet was all that Massey's was not. It showed what could be done by an extremely intelligent handling of the role; it revealed new facets of Hamlet's multi-sided personality. Mot of all, it disclosed the magnificent poetic power of the lines Shakespere set down for his actors. The emphasis was on the production, however, and not on the leading actor, all other elements of that production combining to make the character of Hamlet, as well as the story of the play, vivid and moving. Gielgud's admission that he was half bound by tradition in interpreting the play explains, perhaps, why he chose the conventional

unit setting, rather than the newer form such as Bel Geddes' space staging. There is, too, his distrust of anything that might be interpreted as "ham" acting, or "trick" staging. These are accusations which we assume Gielgud would not relish, and which actually could not be made of him. It does explain, however, the reason he has not identified himself with the type of staging often referred to as "progressive", - staging that more closely approximates Shakespere's own methods.

In connection with Gielgud's portrayal,of Hamlet, it is interesting to note once again, that he succeeded in his own aim for the role. It was a success, that, taken artistically or aesthetically, was a triumph, but which pleased the "judicious" rather than the "unskilful". It did not, then, have the same measure of popular success won by Maurice Evans' portrayal of the role. To win that, however, Mr. Evans had to forfeit the full approval of the "judicious."

Maurice Evans and his co-worker, Margaret Webster, seem to share Gielgud's distrust of the newer types of staging. Of them Miss Webster writes:

> More recently, we have had some very moody designs, particularly for such plays as Lear and Hamlet and Macbeth, usually consisting of an arrangement of steps and rostra painted a forbidding dark gray, shifting around occasionally to different relative positions, and illuminated by spare but dramatic shafts of light. The characters are dressed in the Early Bathrobe period and end by looking as if they had got themselves unintentionally benighted on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Such efforts to solve an extremely difficult problem have indeed achieved their objective, in that they have facilitated fluid and unbroken performances of the play; but their extreme architectural quality has often been, in itself, more of a barrier than a stimulant ot the unfettered vision. 3

Mr. Evans and Miss Webster made their greatest contribution to the history

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3 Webster, Margaret, p.

of the play by using the full text. It is not that they advocate that all of Shakespere's texts should be treated in the same way; some of the lesser plays are the better for the weeding out of irrelevant and obviously "dated" material. Shakespere had too high a sense of theatrical values to thrust upon his audience things that were completely out of their ken, and it is to be assumed that he knew when and where to use the blue pencil. Hamlet, however, is not, even in its entirety, out of our ken to-day, and the resulting clarification for the audience of both characters and story, justified the producers' use of the full text.

The ideal held by actor-producer Evans, and director Margaret Webster of translating the character and the play of Hamlet into contemporary human values, was realized, as the press notices testify. At the same time, both Mr. Evans and Miss Webster make it clear that their interpretation was not intended to be definitive. They, like Gielgud, are astute enough, both as artists of the theatre and as lovers of Shakespere, to realize that no one production can be " all things to all men." Nor is there any reason to desire such an achievement. A Hamlet to end all Hamlets would indeed be defeating its own ends.

With the use of the complete text, Mr. Evans' extremely lucid portrayal of the role, and Miss Webster's skilful direction of the play, the production potentially had a sweep and scope heretofore lacking in most presentations of the play. The setting, however, had a tendency to chain down the action. Fortunately for the play, Mr. Evans' performance and that of the rest of the cast were strong enough not to be overshadowed by

the setting.

In summarizing the four productions, a logical approach would be to try to discover what of Shakespere was sacrificed in each presentation of Hamlet. While the setting of the Barrymore Hamlet provided a unifying background, expediting the action, it also overbalanced the performance of John Barrymore, just as his did that of the supporting cast. The Bel Geddes Hamlet betrayed Shakespere in the arbitrary cutting of the text, and in the unsatisfactory performance of Raymond Massey.

It is more difficult to decide where the Gielgud Hamlet lost effectiveness. Perhaps it would be preferable to suggest where it might have gained, namely, in a use of the full text and the use of a method of staging more presentational than representational. This latter suggestion applies to the Evans' Hamlet as well. It could also be suggested that "Shakespeare's Man" failed his master by sacrificing a certain amount of subtlety for popular appeal in portraying the role of Hamlet.

It is interesting to muse on the possibilities of a Hamlet staged by Norman Bel Geddes, assisted by Robert Edmond Jones, costumed by Mielziner, and directed by Margaret Webster, using the full text which she advocates. The knotty problem would be the choice of a leading actor, and it would doubtless fall between Gielgud and Evans. It would be interesting to see which actor's style proved more adaptable to the new medium, and which interpretation would be the more vivid and understandable for being brought more sharply into focus. The chances are

they would both continue to interpret Shakespere each in their own way, each realizing, intheir own way, success. If this were so, then perhaps Mr. Evans and Mr. Gielgud could play the role alternate evenings, as Mr. Gielgud and Laurence Olivier have done at the Old Vic.

The chief problem in such a Utopian production of Hamlet would be a danger of too many cooks spoiling the broth, and what Gordon Craig has to say concerning a production having one master, makes us pause in our conjecturing. But since it is a Utopian production, then we may safely assume that complete co-operation would be its keynote, with the subjection of personal aims, pet theories, and artistic temperaments - all in the cause of the common good!

To return to the more certain ground, however, the examination of these productions of Hamlet brings to light some salient demands which the play makes of the producers. These demands, some of which are simply truisms, may be summarized as follows:

First, the production of Hamlet demands a setting which least hampers the action and does away with scene waits. At the same time, such a setting must not overshadow the action by reason of extravagance, distracting design, or trick effects. Costumes and lighting, of course, must harmonize not only with the setting, but with the actors' interpretation of the play.

Secondly, the use of a reasonable full text is demanded. If the first demand is fulfilled, the production of the play in its entirety is not only possible, but preferable. The script of Hamlet gives ample opportunities of interpretation, and a new "twist" here or there undoubtedly gives it freshness. It is at this point that the distinction between

liberty and license applies: many producers, unaware of the distinction, or purposely disregarding it, have taken licenses which result in "stunt" productions, inartistic, and un-Shakesperian. The Ghost in the Barrymore production proved distracting rather than dramatically effective - John Mason Brown dubbed it "Tinkerbell". The Vakhtangov production, although admittedly an extreme, was doubtless interesting, often comic, and theatrically effective, but it wasn't Shakespere.

Thirdly, a production of Hamlet demands a capable cast with an exceptionally good actor in the leading role. He should not be a Colossus, as Irving was, nor an actor playing another variation of himself, as Leslie Howard was. Unless his dramatic powers are immense, a physically unsuited Hamlet is at a disadvantage, as Raymond Massey was. Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson made his farewell stage appearance in Hamlet at Sanders Theatre, Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1916. He was sixty-three years old at the time, and he acted on a sceneryless replica of an Elizabethan stage. He had the ability to overcome the apparent incongruity of a sixty-three year old man playing the role of a romantic young prince, for those who saw the production report that on its sheer merit, it was exceedingly moving. But men of Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson's dramatic calibre are rare.

And finally, a production of Hamlet demands of its actors the proper speaking of dramatic poetry. "There is but one effective way of speaking dramatic poetry", writes Ashley Dukes." the way of passion and understanding - not a dozen different ways depending on the mood of the cen-

turies."[4] To illustrate this point he cites the example of a modern dress version of Hamlet.* He writes:

> When the modern producer presents the King and Queen of Denmark in modern evening attire, with their courtiers sipping coffee or smoking cigarettes, the spectator is at first astonished. But after five minutes these details cease to matter; the main interest is transferred to the manner in which the familiar lines are spoken. Here the producers of Hamlet in modern dress make their mistake. They imagine that it is necessary to make verse as nearly as possible resemble prose. The insist upon conversational tones and habitual gestures. They are unable to free themselves from the naturalistic association of trousers and shirt fronts. 5

Ashley Dukes is not opposed to modern productions of Hamlet, for he is fully aware that new light can be shed upon the play by just such a fresh approach. But, he remarks, "Let us not suppose that dramatic poetry has anything but an absolute value".

This brings us to a consideration of the obstacles confronting a production of Hamlet unrestricted by any save aesthetic considerations, or, for that matter, of any of Shakespere's plays. The most obvious of these, and the one about which the producer can do least, is the lack of appreciation of the spoken word, and especially of the poetically spoken word. Remedying the need with his cast still does not solve the difficulty, for there is the audience with an even greater lack of appreciation than his actors.

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4 Dukes, Ashley, Drama, London, 1926, p. 232.

5 Ibid., p. 230-1.

* Although it is not identified as such, Mr. Dukes' description of the production suggests that it was that of Sir Barry Jackson, discussed in Chapter III.

The realization that there is such a lack is common not only to people of the theatre, but to writers in all literary media.[6]

What is applicable to our reading habits is applicable to speech habits as well. We rely on a single word or a catch phrase to speak volumes; Lee Simonson sums up the situation nicely when he writes.

> The universal fear os seeming verbally elaborate or pretentious has made conversation, like letter-writing, a lost art. No one will take the time that it requires...The cult of the "low brow" infects even our intellectuals. If one of them were to take five minutes to qualify an opinion with verbal nicety he would embarrass his friends alsmost as much as if he had arisen to recite "The Wreck of the Hesperus". It is considered better social form to confine critical approval to "swell piece", "a wow", "great stuff", and disparagement to "lousy", "phony", "hooey" or "tripe", and so keep in time with a casual "Okay" or "So long". 7

Lacking the appreciation of the spoken word, and hence, even more acutely, of poetic drama, we must have the lines delivered at a far slower pace than in Shakespere's time. There is, too, the fact that the Elizabethan language is archaic, and therefore we are slower to comprehend its meaning. This has resulted in lengthening productions of Hamlet that were already long because of scene waits and intermissions. Such a slowing-up of the lines slows up the action as well. It is somewhat like seeing a slow motion picture of a tumultuous river at flood time; we are able to see the drops spatter and break, but we miss the thrill of seeing the tremendous rush and force of its natural speed.

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6 The lack, too, is apparent not just in our theatre-going, but in all phases of our everyday living. This age, and particularly on this continent, has had its needs administered by so many labour, time, and thought-saving devices, that the result is laziness, both mental and physical. A glance at a representative few of modern periodicals will illustrate the point - our reading material is concise, condensed, capsule-ized, so that we may take in at a glance all that we wish to glean from this or that article, this or that story or poem. The illustrated periodical, such as Life, Pic and so on, have carried this tendency still further. There is one step so far not taken: nobody has attempted to publish a Digest of the Reader's Digest.

Since words have become a debased currency, the modern playgoer has relied on visual supports to make up the loss. "We no longer have to hear scenery as spectators did in the age of Shakespere". So writes John Mason Brown in The Art of Playgoing; he continues, "Words have been so reinforced by what convinces the eye that they neither have, nor need to have the power of complete persuasion which formerly was theirs."[8] But Shakespere's splendid descriptive lines are there. The use of realistic stage methods explains in part the practice of cutting the texts. On the other hand, if the scenery does not convince the eye, often the lines, when included in the acting version, were made to sound foolish when an actor describing some sylvan scene, pointed to a painted set representing a grove of trees. Juliet's cry, "O swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon!" often contained more truth than poetry, since the audience's attention was drawn to a wavering yellow disc in the "sky", its waverings being the result of faulty stage machinery.

Theatre designers and producers have progressed beyond this until we have such a presentation as Norman Bel Geddes' production of Hamlet. On such a stage the atmospheric lines of Shakespere should not sound strange; rather, they come into their own once more. Unfortunately - and herein lies another obstacle - not a few in the audience expect to see Hamlet presented in a certain way dear to their affections. The playgoer often brings with him to the theatre a priori convictions which

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8 Brown, J. M., The Art of Playgoing, New York, 1936, p. 56.

he either refuses to discard, or is unable to, because the producers have not bridged the gap artistically between tradition and innovation. The playgoer may desire to see Hamlet garbed in Elizabethan dress, or to make his exit through a door with hinges, rather than disappear behind a boulder-like structure on a darkened stage.

But if the playgoer of to-day brings with him a priori convictions, he often leaves behind his understanding, and enters the theatre completely ignorant of Shakespere's, the producer's, and the actors' aims for the play, much less his own reason for seeing it. Of these Bad Playgoers, John Mason Brown writes:

> To them the theatre is only the shortest distance between two hours ... They are anxious to check their judgment and their perceptions with their hats ... They are too sophisticated, too indifferent, and in a sense too cowardly to want to surrender wholeheartedly to the theatre in the manner of their forbears. [9]

The inability of the Bad Playgoer (who could almost be called the Average Playgoer) to surrender wholeheartedly to the theatre has been brought about by a number of factors. Part of the blame goes to the lack of appreciation of the spoken word. Words have lost their power to enthrall many of us, either through the intellect, or through an appeal to the emotions by rhythm and cadence. Some of the blame may be laid to the all-too-prevalent insistence on "keeping up with the Joneses" . To be seen at the opening night of Hamlet is as important to some as owning a few good paintings and an impressive array of books by the right authors. The movies, too, can take a large share of the blame. They have glutted the audience's imagination. The playgoer who has seen sailors boarding real ships on a sea that is obviously very real and very wet, is not content with a mere description of such action.

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9 Ibid, p. 17.

To him, Hamlet's description is inadequate.

> Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour; and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant they got clear of our ship; so I alone became their prisoner.[10]

His reaction is - Show it to me.

A more dastardly deed, however, has been done by the movies to theatre productions of Hamlet, or of any good drama, and it helps to explain the psychology of the Bad Playgoer. The movies, in placing the emphasis on "Entertainment Value" (in the sense of relaxed or unthoughtful entertainment) as their criterion, have failed, in many cases, to justify their existence in terms of an artisitic media stimulating not only emotion but thought in its beholders. They have succeeded as entertainment, but unfortunately the conception of movie-going as a source of relaxation has been carried over to a misconception of the theatre as solely a source of entertainment of the same kind. When the theatre houses musical comedies, variety shows, and those of the "Hellzapoppin" type, then it is a source of relaxing entertainment. But drama, whether tragic, and possessing purgative powers with which its Greek originators endowed it, or comic, and provoking what Meredith calls "thoughtful laughter", is not intended to exist as entertainment of a light and superficial nature. Hamlet has not earned its reputation as "Amusing", "Good for a laugh", "Entertaining: for adults only".

If the playgoer could learn to enjoy a more imaginative participation in the theatre, he could add something creative to the work of the author, actor, and director. Max Reinhardt, however, overworked the principle of audience participation in some of his circus-theatre productions, for,

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10 Hamlet, IV, iv.

during that of Danton, the actors and supers taking part in the court scene were scattered among the audience "so that one was frightened to death when one's neighbour screamed and one never knew whether one was witnessing a nervous fit of a spectator or the performance of an artist".[11] There is, however, a happy medium of audience participation, and that is largely in a subjection on the part of the playgoer to the mood and theme of the play, as well as an attempt to identify himself with the aims of the producer and actors presenting it. He must be willing to suspend disbelief, to acknowledge the fact that he is in a theatre, and be prepared to free his imagination rather than keep it at close haul. When a producer of Hamlet finds a whole theatre of such playgoers, then he is free to concentrate on the artistic, rather than the popular values of the production.

There is another obstacle, however, an obstacle which has blocked more than one artistically successful production of Hamlet. The obstacle is the Box Office Bogey which has a strangle-hold on audience and producer alike. However much the aspirations of the producer soar, and with them the imaginative powers both of actor and audience, the theatre remains chained to its plot of ground - and an expensive plot of ground at that. In theatrical centers such as New York and London, high taxes or high rentals on buildings increase the cost of production. There is the cost of a designer who commands a fee of anywhere from $500 to $2,000 according to Lee Simonson.[12] There is the cost of the sets themselves, the costumes, the wages of a large stage crew, including skilled electricians to work out elaborate light plots. Musicians must be paid, as well as press agents and advertising agencies. Finally, there are wages for the cast. "Shakespeare will need a large cast",

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[11] Dickinson, T.H., p. 160.

[12] Simonson, L., p. 383.

says Margaret Webster (and she ought to know) "of whom the least apprentice spear carrier ... must be paid a salary higher than the normal earning of a trained and experienced young doctor with years of intensive study to his credit". The leading actors and the star must be paid salaries "which may totally imperil the economics of the whole enterprise".[13]

Realizing the extent of production costs, it is easy to understand Lee Simonson when he writes:

> The profits of putting on a successful play are so fabulous, and the losses of putting on a failure are so catastrophic, that a theatrical producer is not in the business of putting on plays but of finding and producing "smash hits". [14]

For this reason the producer cannot always follow his own artistic ideals. With one eye on the box office he has to present a production of Hamlet that will allow no chances of a catastrophic failure.

Many are the suggestions for remedying this situation; one is a government supported theatre, such as has existed in Russia, Germany and elsewhere on the Continent. This will not come in England or America until the theatre is recognized, not as a source of entertainment for the people, and a source of "entertainment tax" for the government, but as an important and integral part of the national life. Then, perhaps, there will be in England and America acting groups similar to the Moscow Art Theatre. Until that time, however, the commercialism of the theatre is one of the most tangible and ever-present obstacles confronting a wholly artistic production of Shakespere's plays.

Contemporary events are exerting their influence on the theatre - on the drama that is being written for it, and the methods of staging. The influences have had both a practical and spiritual effect on the theatre.

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13 Webster, M., p. 304.

14 Simonson, L., p. 382.

German bombs have destroyed both property and human lives, but in the destruction of the latter, the importance of the former has faded. The people have a new set of human values, and count themselves lucky if their family circle, and not their roof, is intact. London, representing English theatrical practice, has clung to realistic staging methods, to the representational rather than the presentational stage. With this new or renewed emphasis on intangible rather than tangible values, it is reasonable to suggest that the English stage may turn to a more presentational method of staging.

Practically speaking, they have had to do so. Shortages of materials, of labour, and the destruction by bombs of ready-made sets have forced theatrical producers to look around for substitutes of a simpler nature. Ashley Dukes in an article entitled "Wartime Theatre" writes,

> Any little theatre possessing its own workshop and store can solve the scenic problems of the moment, which consist in turning out light mobile screens, say ten feet high ... With a background of draperies these are now used to represent any scene at will ...[15]

There are other changes cited by Mr. Dukes. Publicity is almost non-existent, since war news has supplanted most other kinds. Because of black-out regulations, the curtain is at six instead of eight-thirty, and the audience no longer arrives late after a dinner party, and sees the first act through an imdigestive haze.

> This revolution in the opening hours has many advantages, and no artist or playwright will prefer the after-dinner public as an audience. Nor will the sensible producer wish again to hazard all on the chances of a social occasion.[16]

Many shows, too, are going "on the road". This is true not only of England but America as well. At the time of writing, Maurice Evans,

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15 Dukes, Ashley, "Wartime Theatre", Theatre Arts, XXVI, ii, p. 92.

16 Ibid., p. 93.

a captain in the United States Army, is in Hawaii producing shows for the troops. "As the program progresses", writes the army reporter in the New York Times, "dogfaces here may be in for a little Shakespeare - even the yardbird who told the captain (Evans) he'd seen only one of the bard's plays, "Tobacco Road".[16] But Capt. Evans intends to give them Shakespere, which he says never requires elaborate sets. Perhaps the yardbird will then have seen two of the Bard's plays, Hamlet, and Tobacco Road!

That Hamlet holds interest for a crowd of soldiers from all types of environment, or a group of Shakespere lovers who make an annual pilgrimage to the Shakespere Memorial Theatre, proves its versatility. That it can be staged with a few rudimentary scenery props at an army camp, or in a theatre designed for Shakespere's plays is proof, again, of its versatility. To both audiences, the play, as well as the actors, has something to say.

> It is probably that, if you could put Edwin Booth onto a bare Elizabethan stage, John Barrymore among some eighteenth century perspective "wings", Richard Burbage into a production of the Belasco school, or Edwin Forrest upon some architectural formation evolved by Norman Bel Geddes, in each case the actor would stare for a few moments and presently get back into the skin of Hamlet. The lines that have echoed through three hundred years would begin to exercise their old power. Dramatic truth has many faces, many voices; it is more important than any of its backgrounds.[17]

Doubtless there are going to be many changes in the structure of the theatre, and of the stage, in the people who sit in that theatre, and in the actors who act for them. As Miss Webster said, dramatic truth alone remains unchanged. Dramatic truth as delineated by Shakespere in Hamlet will be given many faces and many voices. Through all of them it will find its way to the hearts and minds of the listeners. "God gave us not that capability and godlike reason to fust in us unused".

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16 Miller, Sgt. Merle, "Captain Evans New Hit", The New York Times, April 11, 1943.

17 Webster, M., p. 255.

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