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The Globe

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A Paper and Project
Presented to
Dr. Gilbert Morris
Ouachita Baptist University

In Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Honors

by
Charlotte Pillow
December 1971

The Globe

The Globe Theater-common word to many, even those who have just heard of Shakespeare-is gone forever. Where? Perhaps, for firewood, for the building of other houses, and removed again for another home. If wood could only talk, what fascinating stories we would have. The building is gone-and we wish that there was some sort of historical record. Therefore, reconstruction is the answer; the interesting phase in this exercise is that the truth could never be known. Where the historical records end, the imagination begins.

Why recreate? Perhaps, it is a form of ancestor worship-the idea of security of our own memorials in the future. If we thus pay tribute to our forefathers, we may expect to be repaid when our time comes to be forefathers. This restoration or piecing-together is often questioned because details are so few. For example, there is great reverence given to Shakespeare's plays; however, working details of his stage are difficult to locate. Even his own life is rather hazy. These challenges push research, but also provide pleasures in this detective game. Is this all? For some, no. These so-called curiosities and relics are seen for what they are;

they are not seen as curiosities but as examples of artistic styles which are every inch as good and sometimes better than our own (these examples may be unlike our own, of course-and so it is with the Elizabethan theater.) According to C. Walter Hodges, author of The Globe Restored, "I do not think it can be claimed that as a theatre it was any better than our own, though in most respects it was as good. The question of comparative quality is not the point, however. The point is that the presentations of the Elizabethan theater were expressed in an artistic style which was different from ours, and was largely abandoned in favor of the scenery theater, not because it was essentially inferior to it, but because the scenery theater has all the glamour of aristocratic taste and of magic novelty to back it up."

London had at least fourteen theaters from the latter half of the reign of Elizabeth the First till the time of the Civil War. Some were called private theaters and built indoors for the comfortable entertainment of fairly small but select audiences; but the rest were public places built like Roman amphitheaters, open to the sky, and each capable of holding about two thousand spectators. The name of one will remain illustrious so long as there is any history of theaters at all. It is that of Shakespeare's theater, the Globe.

Details of more than twenty actors' companies who worked in these theaters (Elizabethan and Jacobean London)

as well as many as five hundred individual actors are known to us today by name and are easily found. From documents, details of their management and organization, details of their legal and business affairs, and details of their parts in plays can be found today. However, the ironical point is that with all of this residue of fame and knowledge to guide the reconstruction, there are more uncertainties about the actual stagecraft employed in the original production of one of Shakespeare's plays at the Globe than there are of any other event of comparable importance in the whole history of the theater.

Let us look at a contrast between the modern theater and the Elizabethan theater. The character of the modern stage is rooted in the technical machinery that houses it and provides its effects. But the Elizabethan theater was portable, self-contained, adjustable, and independent of any surrounding other than its audience. As a result, this theater could be taken from theater to palace or farm with little trouble.

One fact which can be called a fact as far as history tells us is the process of the Elizabethan playgoer. When he approached one of the big public playhouses to see the afternoon's show, he came, in most cases, to a round building (this includes polygonal since this gives the same general impression as opposed to a rectangular building). Built over the top of this round building was a hut, usually quite small, and over the hut there

waved a flag. As he went in at the door, he paid his money into a box, which was held by one of the playhouse staff called a "gatherer". This money allowed the playgoer to enter the open yard where the stage stood; around the yard, overlooking the stage, three tiers of galleries were built. This information seems to be a certainty while the number of entrance doors are even questioned.

The term "upper stage" occurs in the Elizabethan texts because the Elizabethans did occasionally use the term. One of the many familiar examples embodying the use of the upper level occurs in "The Merchant of Venice," Act II, scene v, where "Enter Jessica, above; in boy's clothes." She speaks with Lorenzo who awaits her below, throws him down a casket, then "Exit above," then seven lines further on, "Enter Jessica below." This indicates an upper level on the stage.

The frequent dramatic use of what seems to have been a permanent upper level is the most characteristic single feature of Elizabethan stage practice. Since it is such a peculiarity, we ought to consider not only how it was used, but also whence it was derived. These facts will help us to visualise its appearance. The commonest and simplest form of this upper level use is that which was quoted above: one character watches, or speaks down to another character below, as from the balcony or window of a house—for example, Juliet at her window with Romeo below. Another common form, especially in the earlier

plays of the period is the use of the upper level as a podium from which an introductory character may comment upon the unfolding of the play below. For example, in "Taming of the Shrew" we find Christopher Sly and his 'wife' sitting there to watch the whole play and making comments from time to time. However, we also find that the whole previous introductory scene of Sly's awakening in the lord's bedroom with nearly one hundred and fifty lines of comedy is staged as aloft. What type of upperlevel is this?

The upper stage is usually represented as a balustraded open gallery, continuing the line of the auditorium galleries on the middle level. Such an arrangement is well-suited for the simple house-and-window scenes as those from "The Merchant of Venice" and "Romeo and Juliet" as quoted above; but it surely presents difficulties when it has to cope with this scene from "The Taming of the Shrew". There is a strong theory which describes the upper level as follows: the upper level was always used to represent bedchamber and upper-room scenes. This idea, of course, would easily explain staging techniques as found in these different plays. If this was a common practice, then the playgoers would automatically know the situation and the why behind it. Of course, controversies rage over this piece of staging-the imagination must take over where others suppose.

The criticism by Richard Flecknoe, in Restoration

days, about the "plain and simple" methods of Shakespeare's theater as having no scenery "nor Decorations of the Stage, but onely old Tapestry and the Stage strewed with Rushes," has been more often quoted and had a much wider effect than the somewhat contradictory statement with which he followed this criticism: "For Scenes and Machines they are no new invention, our Masks and some of our Playes in former times (though not so ordinary) having had as good or rather better than we have now." In Victorian times, the "plain and simple" view went unchallenged, though with it there went a puritanical approval of plainness and simplicity. Poetry, wit, passion, humor, wisdom could be relished by our ancestors without today's costly and labored contrivances.

Until recently it used to be believed that Shakespeare's theater was deliberately intended to give the impression of the normal domestic architecture of the day. The idea is contrary to the very nature of Elizabethan drama. It is true that there was an important group of Elizabethan plays that dealt with the contemporary scene, but the great majority of their drama was otherwise. Of Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays not one was set in the England of his day; all were evocations of the romantic past or the romantic distance, or both; and all were intentionally so. Not even "Twelfth Night," which one would take to be very contemporary and English in feeling, was allowed to come nearer home than Illyria. Temples, palaces, and

towers were the characteristic backgrounds of the Elizabethan drama. Therefore, unless it can be shown that Elizabethan managers and actors were ignorant of any architecture but that of their own streets, or else had not the means or the imagination to provide themselves with any other, we ought to suppose that their theaters were furnished in a style at least suggestive of some sort of fantasy and splendor. And since a robust and fanciful ostentation has been typical of all popular entertainment from the most ancient times, one would surely expect to find evidence of it on the Elizabethan stage.

There are, of course, evidences of this being true. Puritan preachers lifted their cries "long and loud" concerning those "sumptuous theatre houses, a continual monument of London's prodigality and folly." This quote and many similar ones range over a period from 1577, the year after the first theater was built, till after 1592. Since the theaters continued to prosper and were increasingly patronised by people of taste and culture, it is hardly likely that they decreased in splendor as time went on. In 1611 Thomas Coryat published in his "Crudities" an account of his travels in Europe. He visited a theater in Venice and described it as "beggarly and base in comparison to England's playhouses." Therefore, defenders and detractors agree that the theaters were decked out in some sort of splendor.

There runs an Elizabethan taste for gory realism along with the other features of the Elizabethan theater. In their frequent scenes of battle, murder, and sudden death, the actors would carry hidden bladders of pig's blood which spouted forth when they were pricked. They staged scenes of execution in which the entrails of animals bought from the slaughter-houses were plucked out from the "victims" and exhibited to the spectators, as was done to the hanging, drawing, and quartering of victims by the executioner at Tyburn. Shakespeare was not an innovator, and he was generally content to use the material as he found it within the prevailing fashions of the theater. But he did not have much use for the Heaven and Hell devices of the popular stage. He sometimes made use of the Hell trap in the conventional way for bringing in ghosts and apparitions, and there are two instances when Shakespeare made use of the flying machine-both catering to the popular taste.

Some of the effects which the Elizabethans set out to achieve were so far removed from our own tastes that they cannot be judged by our theatrical standards at all. For example, we should miss altogether the significance of the emblematic imagery which was an intellectual fad of that time to read and decipher. "Enter Rumour, painted full of tongues," is an image which we would understand at once when seen "in words" at the beginning of "Henry" Act II, scene lv, but it may be

doubted whether we should at once "read" the significance of the costume if it were newly shown to us, without a written explanation on the stage. Fame, with her trumpet or sometimes for good measure two, we can easily understand, but Shame with a "black" trumpet, in the early plays of Cambyses, has a distinction we might miss.

All of the above simply boils down to the idea that the Globe has certain characteristics which are considered true (such as shape-round or polygonal; stage; galleries) and characteristics which are considered probable and some improbable. However, we do concede the fact that the Shakespearean drama was vastly different from today's drama. If transported to Shakespeare's day, we would probably be bored with the entertainment since we are conditioned for a different style-and the same if one of Shakespeare's contemporaries were transported into our setting. Of course, we would find this interesting for a while. With a handful of imagination plus a few books with sketches of their idea of the Globe, I present my Globe.

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Copy of Shakespeare's Globe Theater Being Built By Actor Who'll Produce Plays 'With Humility'

LONDON (AP) — A new Shakespearean theater being created in London, is modeled after the Bard's own Globe Theater, as near as research can establish.

George Murcell plans to stage Elizabethan dramas as they originally were presented, with emphasis on words and acting. No fantastic costuming, and no liberties with the texts.

Murcell has the building and financial backing.

What's more, he emphasizes, he has the wholehearted support of his wife Elvi Hale, an actress who was Anne of Cleves in the

television series. "The Six Wives of Henry VIII."

Murcell himself has acted in classical and modern plays, in films, on television and on radio.

His dream, the 800-seat St. George's Elizabethan Theater, is taking shape in the borough of Islington, about three miles north of London's theater belt.

The building, the unused Church of St. George, was built in 1867. A Victorian architect, George Truefitt, modeled it after a Crusader church at Salonika, Greece.

"We saved hundreds of thou-

sands of pounds by getting this building," said Murcell. "It would cost an absolute fortune to build anything like this today, all in solid stone."

Murcell, 45, was born in Italy. His French-Canadian father was in the shipping business. His mother was Italian opera singer Lucia Bougeia.

"I saw my first Shakespeare in Italian opera," Murcell recalled. "When I went to school in England at the age of 11, I found I had a different, more colorful, Shakespearean imagery compared with the others at the

school."

Murcell said he dislikes directors who "manipulate" the Shakespeare texts.

"We hope in the St. George's Theater to present the plays simply and with humility," he says. "Perhaps we can find new truths in them rather than try to impose our own modern truths on the plays."

As for modern actors, Murcell observes: "Half of the actors in the classical theater cannot breathe. They cannot deliver six lines of Shakespeare in one breath. Which is the acid test