The fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries saw Europe transformed by the extraordinary cultural revolution we now call the European Renaissance. Fueled by new technology such as printing and by new scientific, political, and religious ideas, explosive change transformed European culture. The known world expanded beyond the sea to embrace the New World; the recovery of Greek and Latin literature spurred a sweeping intellectual revolution; strong centralized monarchies in Spain, Portugal, France, and England created new empires abroad and fought to control an increasingly restive populace at home; the Protestant Reformation undermined the religious and political authority of the Catholic church, beginning a period of violent religious conflict; and the "new philosophy"—modern science—of Copernicus, Bacon, and Galileo seemed to put even the physical world of heaven and earth in doubt. "'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone," the poet John Donne wrote in 1611, voicing the profound anxiety and exhilaration of many of his contemporaries: "Prince, subject, father, son are things forgot. / For every man alone thinks that he hath got / To be a Phoenix." The changing tides of thought swept away the crumbling edifice of the medieval world—the feudal state, the universal church, scholastic philosophy, an ordered heaven, and revealed truth—and opened the way for the modern world.

This revolution also infused the theater; the Renaissance, especially in Italy, France, Spain, and England, is one of the great ages of theatrical and dramatic achievement. In England, the professional theater as we know it originated at this time: the history of the secular, profit-making, commercial theater is conventionally dated from the opening of The Theatre in London in 1576. Licensed and protected as an aristocratic entertainment, the theater was also a popular institution in which commoners such as William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, Edward Alleyn, Inigo Jones, and others, could indeed rise like the phoenix. However, to understand the revolutionary impact of theater and drama in Shakespeare's era, we need to understand their conservative inheritance, their deep indebtedness to the medieval stage that preceded them.

Drama and Theater in Medieval England

Dramatic performance in medieval Europe was thoroughly conditioned by the Catholic church's central role in the life of the community. Having closed the Roman theaters in the sixth century, the church maintained a vigilant opposition to the secular theater and the vices associated with it. Yet the revival of theater in Europe, beginning in the tenth century, was inspired and sponsored by the church itself. The four major dramatic forms in the late Middle Ages were connected with the church, its rituals, and its calendar of religious observances: **LITURGICAL DRAMA** enacted as part of the liturgy of the Catholic Mass; **CYCLE PLAYS,** illustrating scriptural history and performed by craft guilds on the feast of Corpus Christi; **MORALITY DRAMA,** enacting the symbolic structure of Christian life; and plays written and performed in schools and universities, sometimes imitating classical plays. In England, cycle and morality plays particularly influenced the later, secular drama of the sixteenth century.

Liturgical Drama

The earliest dramatic records, dating from the ninth century, are musical **TROPES,** brief elaborations of the authorized liturgy, written to amplify the scriptural text and enhance its impact and appeal. These compositions were set to music and sung in **ANTIPHONAL PERFORMANCE** (back and forth, in dialogue) between monks or boy choristers to accompany the liturgy of the Mass. In England, Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, wrote a series of lessons concerning the conduct of the Mass, the *Regularis Concordia* (965–975), including instructions for such performances. What follows are his instructions to the priests for representing the visit of the three Marys to the tomb of Christ after the Crucifixion (translated from Latin). This trope is often called the *Quem Quaeritis,* after the Latin text spoken by the "angel": "Whom seek you?":

> While the third lesson is being chanted, let four brethren vest themselves; of whom, let one, vested in an alb, enter as if to take part in the service, and let him without being observed

approach the place of the sepulchre [i.e., near the altar], and there, holding a palm in his hand, let him sit down quietly. While the third responsory is being sung, let the remaining three follow, all of them vested in copes, and carrying in their hands censers filled with incense; and slowly, in the manner of seeking something, let them come before the place of the sepulchre. These things are done in imitation of the angel seated in the monument, and of the women coming with spices to anoint the body of Jesus. When therefore that one seated shall see the three, as if straying about and seeking something, approach him, let him begin in a dulcet voice of medium pitch to sing:

Whom seek ye in the sepulchre, O followers of Christ?

When he has sung this to the end, let the three respond in unison:

Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified, O celestial one.

To whom that one:

He is not here; he is risen; just as he foretold.
Go, announce that he is risen from the dead.

At the word of this command let those three turn themselves to the choir, saying:

Alleluia! The Lord is risen to-day.
The strong lion, the Christ, the Son of God. Give thanks to God.

This said, let the former, again seating himself, as if recalling them, sing the anthem:

Come, and see the place where the Lord was laid. Alleluia! Alleluia!

And saying this, let him rise and let him lift the veil and show them the place bare of the cross, but only the cloths laid there with which the cross was wrapped. Seeing which, let them set down the censers which they carried into the same sepulchre, and let them take up the cloth and spread it out before the eyes of the clergy; and as if making known that the Lord had risen and was not now therein wrapped, let them sing this anthem:

The Lord is risen from the sepulchre.
Who for us hung upon the cross.

And let them place the cloth upon the altar. The anthem being ended, let the Prior, rejoicing with them at the triumph of our King, in that, having conquered death, he arose, begin the hymn:

We praise thee, O God.

This begun, all the bells chime out together.[1]

Despite its brevity and the limitations imposed by the liturgy itself, this trope has the elements of drama: a progressive plot, the involvement of specific characters, conflict and resolution. Ethelwold's "stage directions" convey a subtle sense of how character can be created by performance and a fine sense of visual spectacle as well, all within the narrow scope allowed by the Mass.

Cycle Drama

Throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, liturgical plays of this kind became increasingly common and complex. Enacted in different locations within the church, called **MANSIONS,** liturgical drama provided a model for the forms of religious drama that came to be performed outside the church and outside the framework of the liturgy. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the church sponsored dramatized scenes from the life of Christ or the lives of the saints, staged on important Christian holidays. For example, a town might commemorate the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday with a procession to the cathedral in which townspeople enacted various roles. In addition, the church oversaw the production of cycles of plays, which became a principal mode of theatrical and

[1] *Regularis Concordia,* in *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas,* ed. Joseph Quincy Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 9–10.

dramatic innovation. These cycles were performed sixty days after Easter as part of the feast of Corpus Christi, a holiday inaugurated in the fourteenth century to celebrate the doctrine of the Eucharist. The Corpus Christi festival frequently featured the performance of a series of plays dramatizing scriptural history: the Creation, Old Testament events (Noah and the Flood, Abraham and Isaac), scenes from the New Testament (the Annunciation, Herod and the Slaughter of the Innocents), and prophetic plays concerning the Harrowing of Hell and the Last Judgment. The production of these plays could last several days or weeks and called on the services of the entire town. Each craft guild (or *mystery,* as the guilds were called; the cycles are sometimes called **MYSTERY CYCLES**) financed and produced a different play, often on a subject appropriate to the guild. The shipwrights' guild might undertake the Noah play, the Three Kings play might be assigned to the goldsmiths, and so on. The plays were the property of the guilds and passed through generations of guild members. In major towns with many craft guilds, the cycles often included a large number of plays. Of the English cycles, the York cycle is the longest, containing forty-eight plays; the Towneley cycle has thirty-two; and the Chester cycle has twenty-four (the Towneley Cycle is known by the name of the family who owned the single manuscript holding the plays until the nineteenth century; many of the plays may have been performed in Wakefield, and the cycle has also been called the Wakefield Cycle).

Although they were produced for a popular, largely illiterate audience, the cycle dramas are extremely sophisticated and required the talents of trained performers. One of the cycles' most powerful and typical features is their use of **ANACHRONISM**—the blending of the historical past with contemporary events and characters. Many of the characters who appear in the plays are medieval English peasants, who often display an ironic, even theatrical sense of their involvement in the scriptural events of the past. One of the most telling uses of this technique occurs in the York *Crucifixion;* the York playwright conveys the Roman soldiers' hardness to the message of Christ by making them jest with him about the crucifixion they are performing:

> **1 SOLDIER:** (*To* CHRIST.) Say, Sir, how likes you now
> This work that we have wrought?
> **2 SOLDIER:** We pray you say us how
> Ye feel, or faint ye aught.
> **JESUS:** . . . My Father, that all bales [evils] may beet [abate].
> Forgive these men that do me pine [pain].
> What they work wot [know] they nought;
> Therefore, my Father, I crave,
> Let never their sins be sought,
> But see their souls to save.
> **1 SOLDIER:** We! Hark! he jangles like a jay.

By characterizing the jesting Roman soldiers as, in effect, contemporaries of the medieval audience, the play implies that biblical events are part of the audience's contemporary history. Seeing their neighbors enacting the biblical scenes and seeing contemporary characters share the stage with biblical figures must have emphasized the immediacy of the ongoing Christian story.

Morality Drama

Like the cycle plays, morality plays dramatized elements of Christian life. Instead of staging events from scriptural history, morality drama stages a symbolic **ALLEGORY** of the Christian's spiritual journey through life. Increasingly popular throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, plays like *The Castle of Perseverance* (c. 1425), *Mankind* (c. 1470), and *Everyman* (c. 1500) emphasized the individual's struggle with sin, while the cycle plays emphasized the

larger patterns of Christian history. Later playwrights, including Shakespeare, found both models useful. The cycles provided a pattern for staging the epic sweep of secular English history, and morality drama provided a supple device for representing psychological and moral conflict. Morality plays often provided the structure for the secular plays written at schools and universities as well, and for the **INTERLUDES** performed at court as a break from holiday feasting. They also provided a staple technique for characterization in the later secular drama. Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1590) uses the Good and Evil Angels to externalize Faustus's moral conflict, and other playwrights frequently used the devices of morality drama to dramatize the difficulties of political choice. In John Skelton's interlude, *Magnificence* (1516), written for Henry VIII or Thomas Sackville, and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561), the monarch is shown to make his decisions framed by a host of allegorized counselors, good and bad advisers who approximate the role played in morality drama by angels and demons.

Staging Medieval Drama

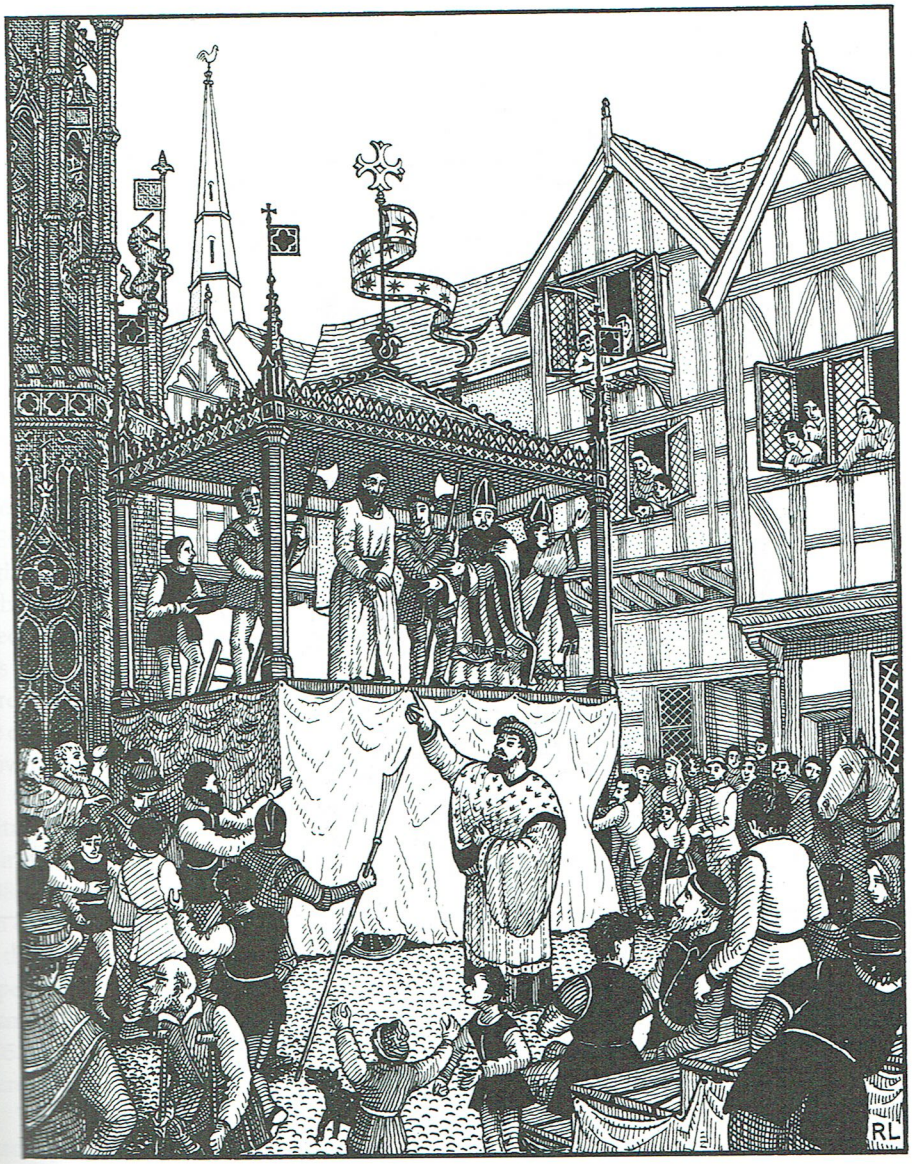
Medieval plays were often acted on or near **PAGEANT WAGONS.** In some towns the audience seems to have remained stationary at various locations while the wagons and their players proceeded past them; in other towns, the wagons were drawn in a procession of **TABLEAUX VIVANTS** (posed scenes) through the town and then arranged in an open area for the performance, allowing the audience to move from play to play. In Chester, for example, a list survives of the stations where the plays were performed, and for York it is possible to trace the route of the pageant wagons through the city; citizens—sometimes those with businesses—could pay to have a station located adjacent to their houses. In York a city official was posted with a copy of the entire cycle as a kind of censor, noting whether the plays were performed according to the script. Given the size and complexity of these performances, it's not surprising to find that they were not easily performed on one day: the procession took three days at Chester and began at 4:30 A.M. in York, lasting until past midnight. The plays combined historical and contemporary elements; in performance, the staging produced a close and powerful relationship between the dramatic characters and the audience. In the Coventry play of the Magi, for example, Herod raves when he discovers that the three kings have escaped him:

> I Stamp! I Stare! I look all about!
>
> Might I them take, I should them burn at a glede [fire]!
>
> I rant! I run! and now run I wode [mad] A! That these villain traitors hath marred this my mood!
>
> They shall be hanged, if I may come them to!
>
> (*Here Herod rages in the pagond* [pageant wagon] *and in the street also.*)[2]

Herod's rage was certainly one of the highlights of the medieval cycles. Shakespeare, at least, seems to refer to it in *Hamlet* (1600), when he has Hamlet remind his actors that they should be restrained and natural in their performance, because overacting "out-Herods Herod." The stage direction also suggests that Herod's frenzy carried him from the wagon and into the street, into a closer and more effective relationship to his audience. This interaction between actor and audience is characteristic of popular theater and is a feature of medieval performance carried into Renaissance acting. It also suggests that the "place" in medieval drama, the fictitious locale of the play, was not firmly localized onstage; the characters could move easily back and forth between Herod's Jerusalem and the world of the audience, and even onstage places could be rapidly and easily transformed. This fluidity also allowed medieval playwrights to treat stage space symbolically. The ground plan of *The Castle of Perseverance,* for instance—with its scaffolds for various evils, its moat

[2]The Coventry *Magi, Herod, and the Slaughter of the Innocents,* in *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas,* ed. Joseph Quincy Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 163.

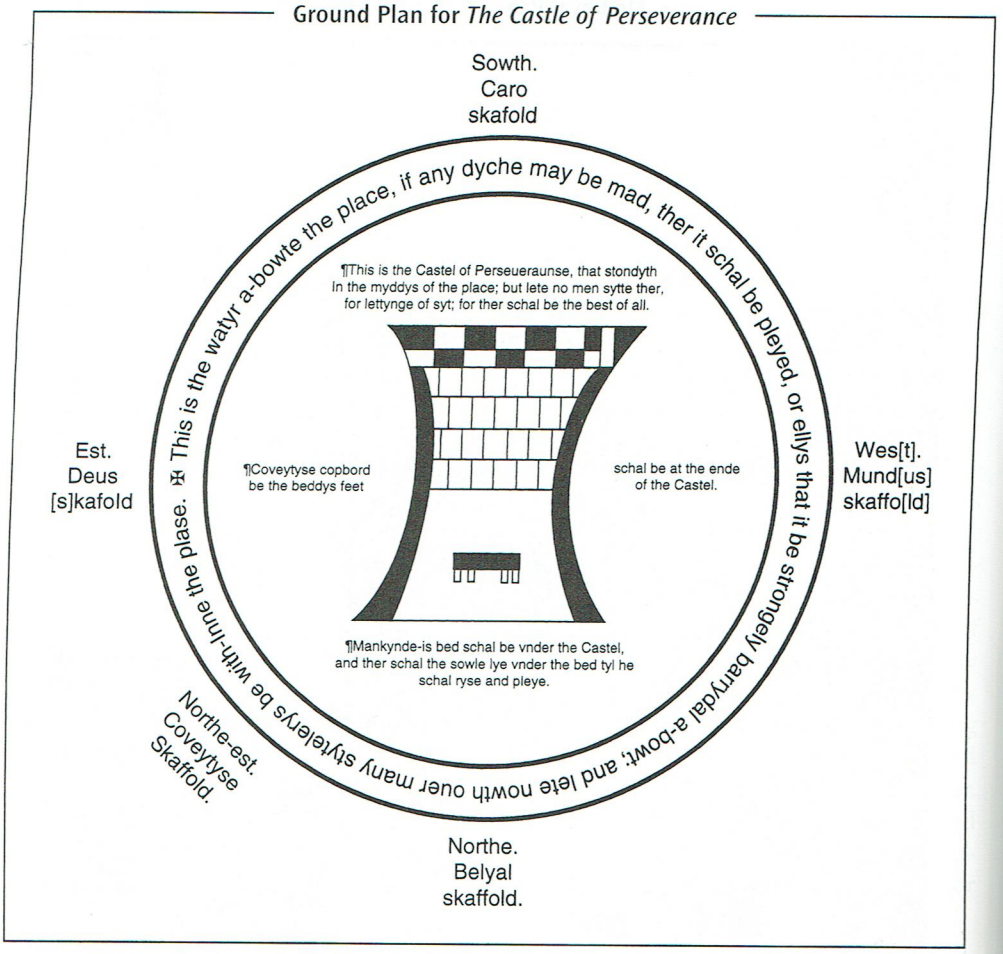
Medieval Pageant Wagon



One actor is playing in the street in front of the wagon.

its central castle—clearly offers us a symbolic locale rather than an actual geography. The various demons on their scaffolds stand at a symbolic distance, not an actual distance, from the central castle.

The English cycle plays are among the highest achievements of Middle English literature, and we are fortunate that these immense popular spectacles remain in written form: the York, N-Town, and Towneley cycles each exist today in a single manuscript; the Chester cycle survives in five different copies. What these texts show is that the complex of dramatic conventions, staging practices, and audience attitudes is a legacy of the medieval theater passed on to later theater. Although the medieval stage was only one of many influences on it, the drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is reminiscent of medieval drama in many ways. Renaissance drama frequently treats secular history according to a providential



The ground-plot for the medieval morality play shows five scaffolds (North, Northeast, South, East, and West) arranged around a playing area, with a castle in the center. A ditch enclosed the castle to keep spectators at a distance. In the manuscript, a note beneath the drawing describes the costumes and special effects: "He that shall play Belial (a devil), look that he have gunpowder burning in pipes in his hands and in his ears, and in his arse, when he goes to battle. The four daughters should be clad in mantles; Mercy in white, Ruthwiseness in red, all together, Truth in sad green, and Peace all in black; and they shall play in the place all together until they bring up the soul."

design similar to that of the cycles; it often treats its characters in the symbolic terms of the medieval morality dramas; and it uses both acting and stage space to create a sense of immediacy between the fictive play and its audience. These habits take on very different meanings in Renaissance London, in a city and in a state in which the Anglican Protestant church is the state religion and where signs of Catholicism—or, in fact, of any religious subject matter—in the theater could be read as an act of sedition. The medieval theater provided the forms of drama and the practices of theater that were refashioned by the political, social, and theatrical pressures of the new era.

Drama and Theater in Renaissance London

The explosion of theatrical and dramatic activity in London can be marked by two dates: 1567, when John Brayne built the Red Lion, London's first purpose-built theater (his brother-in-law, James Burbage, built The Theatre in 1576); and 1642, when plays were suspended and theaters were closed at the outbreak of the Civil War. The theater underwent profound changes from the reign of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603) to the reigns of her successors James I

(1603–1625) and Charles I (1625–1642, executed 1649), yet at the same time it endured the intense social and cultural upheavals of the period with remarkable consistency.

As an institution, the new professional theater witnessed the emergence of England as a modern state; the rise of England as an important mercantile and naval power, aided by the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588; the expansion of English interests in the New World; the growth of the city of London to roughly 250,000 inhabitants; and the ascendance of the Puritan faction that closed the theaters and deposed and executed the king. The professional theater—a new institution in England, though already established on the continent—necessarily reflected the political and social strains of the time. These strains are most readily visible in the many laws regulating theatrical performance. The location of theater buildings, the structure and organization of theater companies, and the entire scene of theatrical activity in Renaissance London epitomized the fundamental tensions of English society as it moved from the medieval to the modern world.

The Professional Theater and Its Society

The sixteenth century witnessed intense religious and civil controversy, dating in part from Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon in 1532 and his consequent excommunication from the Catholic church in 1533. Once Henry established the Protestant Church of England as the religion of the realm in 1535, English politics were often dictated by England's vulnerability to the massive, hostile powers of the Catholic church in Rome and Catholic states such as France and Spain. Within England, a variety of Protestant sects competed with each other, with the government, and with the Church of England for power. This was also a period of profound changes in the ordering of society, a period of growing mercantile power, of aristocratic discontent with the power of the monarchy, and of the rise of new merchants and other social groups into prominence and power. As a result, the Crown was eternally on guard to suppress civil unrest or religious nonconformity.

Given this volatile political climate, it is not surprising that the Crown sought to limit and control public assembly, including theatrical performances. Laws were frequently directed against the theater, particularly against productions identified with England's Catholic past. In 1548, for example, the English church cancelled the Feast of Corpus Christi, and the production of the cycle plays was systematically suppressed. In 1569, the York cycle was performed for the last time, and in 1575, the mayor of Chester was arrested for allowing cycle plays to be performed. The last cycle performance took place in Coventry in 1576, and the last record of any Corpus Christi play being performed in England (before the modern era) dates from 1605, in Kendal. Morality plays may have seemed less sectarian in the kind of instruction they offered; features of morality drama were more readily absorbed by the secular theater.

Yet while the Crown limited and censored the stage, it also maintained its traditional patronage of the theater. The population of London nearly tripled in Shakespeare's lifetime, from roughly 80,000 in 1564 to more than 200,000 at his death in 1616. The Elizabethan era was characterized by several large crop failures, a deflation in the value of currency, repeated bouts of the plague, and persistent threats of invasion from without and sedition from within. Not surprisingly, both the queen and her Privy Council, and the local city magistrates throughout England, were fearful both of itinerant travelers and of large—potentially riotous—assemblies. The famous "Act for the punishment of Vagabonds" of 1572 is a case in point. The law prohibited itinerant players and entertainers from wandering throughout the realm, but its ultimate effect was to establish permanent theatrical companies under the protection of noble patrons. The law ordered that "all Fencers, Bearwards, Common Players in Interludes, and Minstrels, not belonging to any Baron of this Realm, or towards any other honorable Personage of greater Degree . . . [who] wander abroad and have not License of two Justices of the Peace at the least . . . shall be taken adjudged and deemed Rogues Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars." Unless they belonged to the retinue of a nobleman, players were classed with common vagrants and could be arrested and fined. Protected as servants, a company of players could receive a license to perform in public.

The statute points to the strong bond between the theater and the aristocracy, and patents granted by Elizabeth entitled noblemen to retain companies of actors as servants. These patents—granted for the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Shakespeare's company), the Lord Admiral's Men (who produced Marlowe's plays), and others—shaped the professional theater of Renaissance London. Elizabeth authorized such companies to perform "Comedies, Tragedies, Interludes, and stage plays" in public, in London and elsewhere. Yet, in granting these privileges, the Crown made significant qualifications. Elizabeth expanded the powers of her Master of Revels, Edmund Tilney, requiring "all and every plaier or plaiers with their playmakers, either belonging to any noble man or otherwise" to "appear before him with all such plaies, Tragedies, Comedies or showes as they shall in readiness or meaning to sett forth," and to receive his approval before their performance. Censorship in the period was extensive, and Elizabeth also stipulated that plays "be not published or shown in the time of common prayer, or in the time of great and common plague in our said City of London." Religious and civic officials exerted considerable authority over when and where plays could actually be performed and where theaters could legally be built, and they often closed theaters for months at a time because of plague or civil strife.

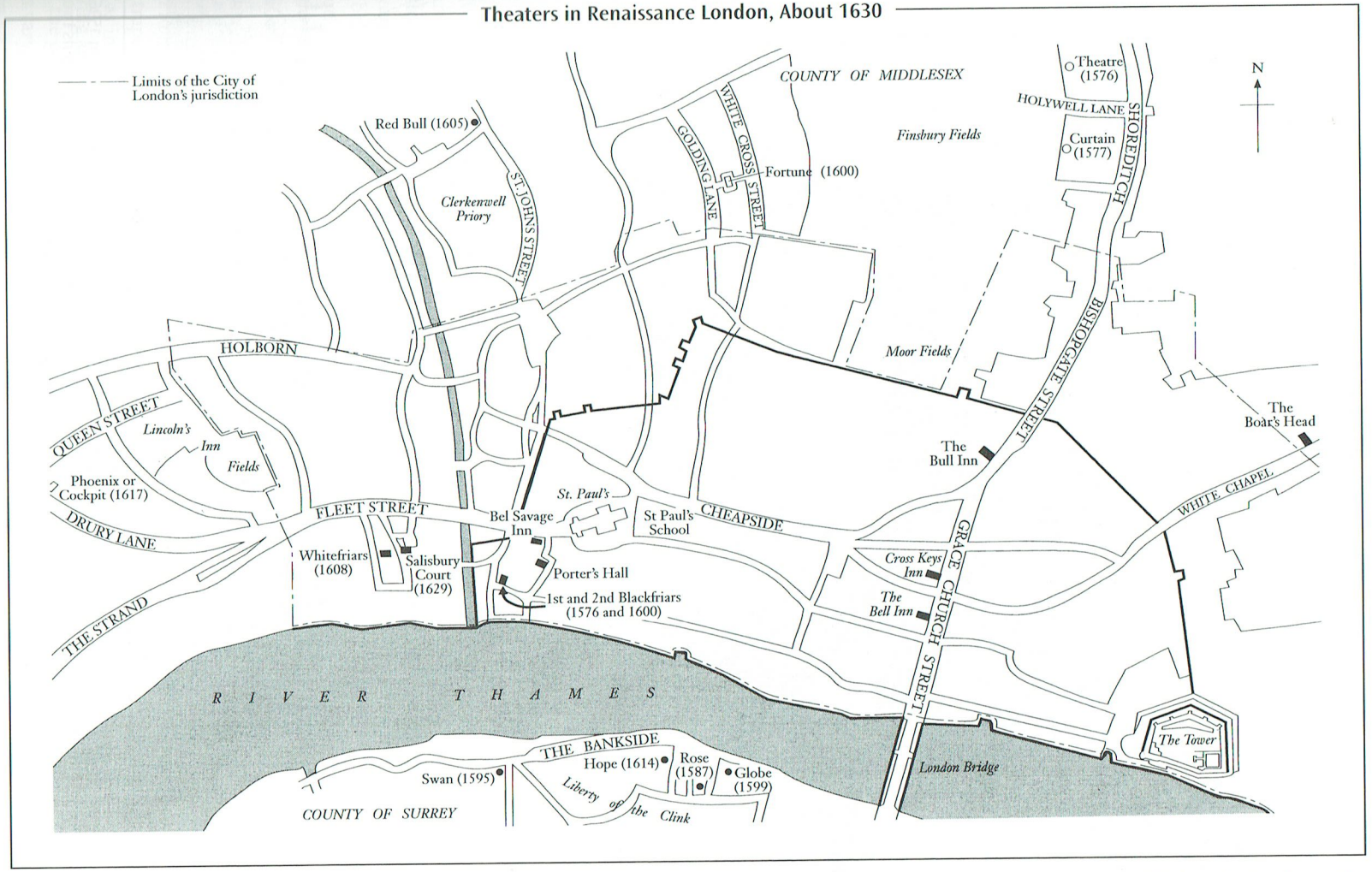
Professional Companies

The City of London, as in many towns, had its own ordinances prohibiting plays within the city limits, and for this reason James Burbage—a member of the Earl of Leicester's company—built The Theatre to the north of the city. Within a decade theaters had been built to the north of the city and to the south, across the Thames River.

Although they were technically liveried "servants" (wearing their patron's insignia when at court), the major acting companies—the most famous being the Lord Chamberlain's Men, patented in 1593 and then given royal sponsorship as the King's Men when King James I succeeded Elizabeth in 1603—were organized as stockholding, profit-making corporations; that is, as business enterprises in the modern sense. Their economic survival depended on their public performances, because their patron might command and finance only a few productions per year. Several investors, or **SHARERS,** put up the capital to finance the company and took a percentage of its profits. The sharers were not just investors; they were involved in all aspects of the theater. In 1603, for instance, the sharers of the King's Men included Shakespeare (playwright and actor), Richard Burbage (James Burbage's son and the company's principal actor, who was the first to play Shakespeare's King Lear, Hamlet, and Macbeth), the actors John Heminges and Henry Condell (who later published Shakespeare's plays), and the comic actors William Kempe (likely played Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Robert Armin (who played the Fool in *King Lear*), among others. The sharers were responsible for building or leasing a theater, for purchasing plays, for taking on boy actors as apprentices, and for hiring other actors for each production. They also were liable when legal proceedings were brought against the company.

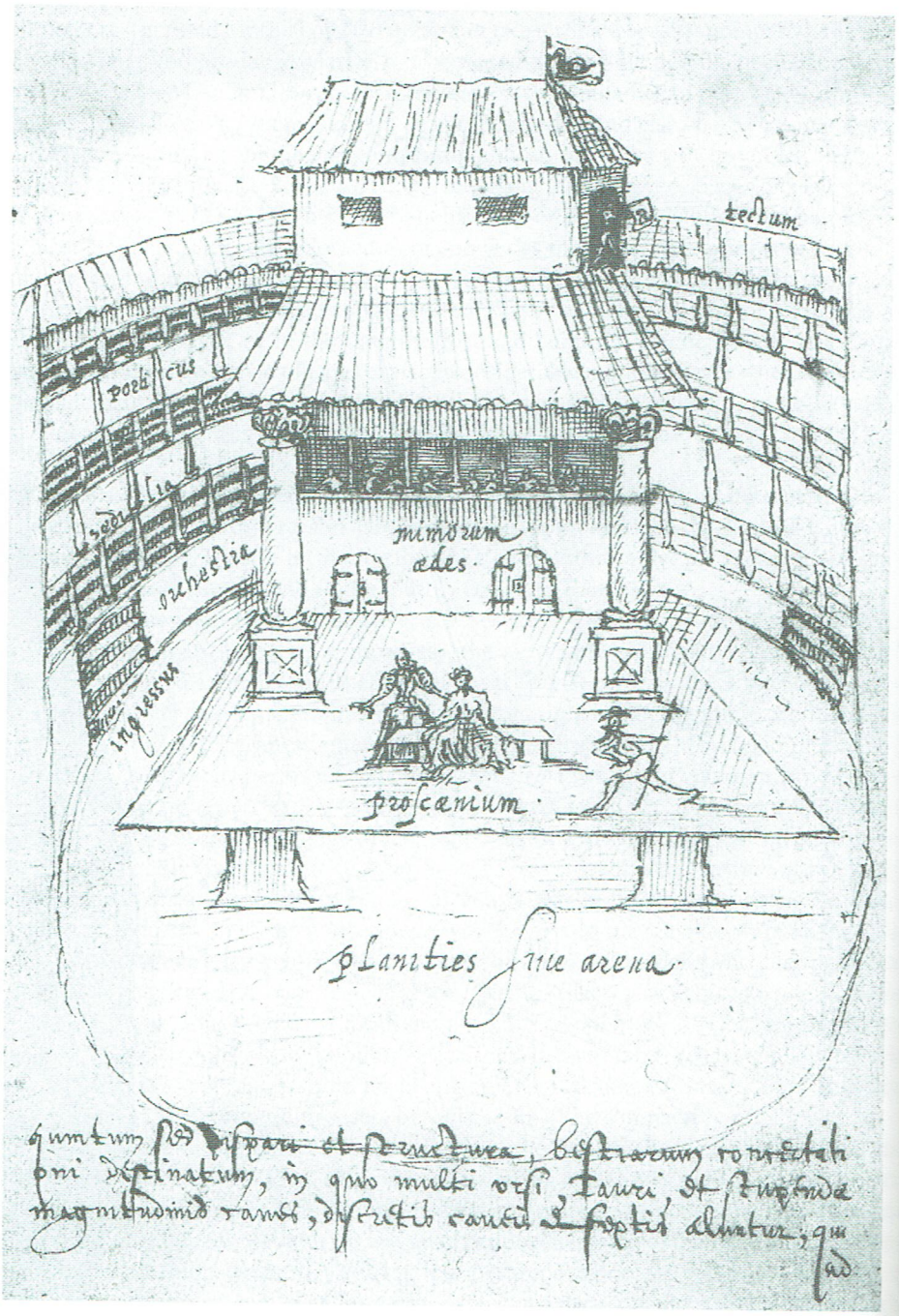
Although several companies flourished during the theater's heyday, life for actors and playwrights was hard. Until 1594, all professional playing companies were forced to perform in a variety of places, in London's various theaters and on tour. Although the scene with the players in *Hamlet* implies that touring was an occasional hardship of the London companies, recent research demonstrates that touring had been commonplace before the building of London's theaters and remained an important aspect of a theater company's vitality throughout the period. Playwrights, who were paid a flat fee by the company for the script of a play, hustled to scrape together a living: Thomas Dekker spent time in debtors' prison, and Ben Jonson died in penury. On the other hand, the theater also provided an opportunity for advancement as well. Several actors, including Richard Burbage and Edward Alleyn, were able to amass considerable fortunes. Shakespeare used the money he received as sharer to invest in property both in London and in his home, Stratford-upon-Avon, where he purchased a large house and land. Such careers were the exception rather than the rule, however, in an era when the theater was widely regarded as illicit and was frequently declared illegal.

Theaters in Renaissance London, About 1630



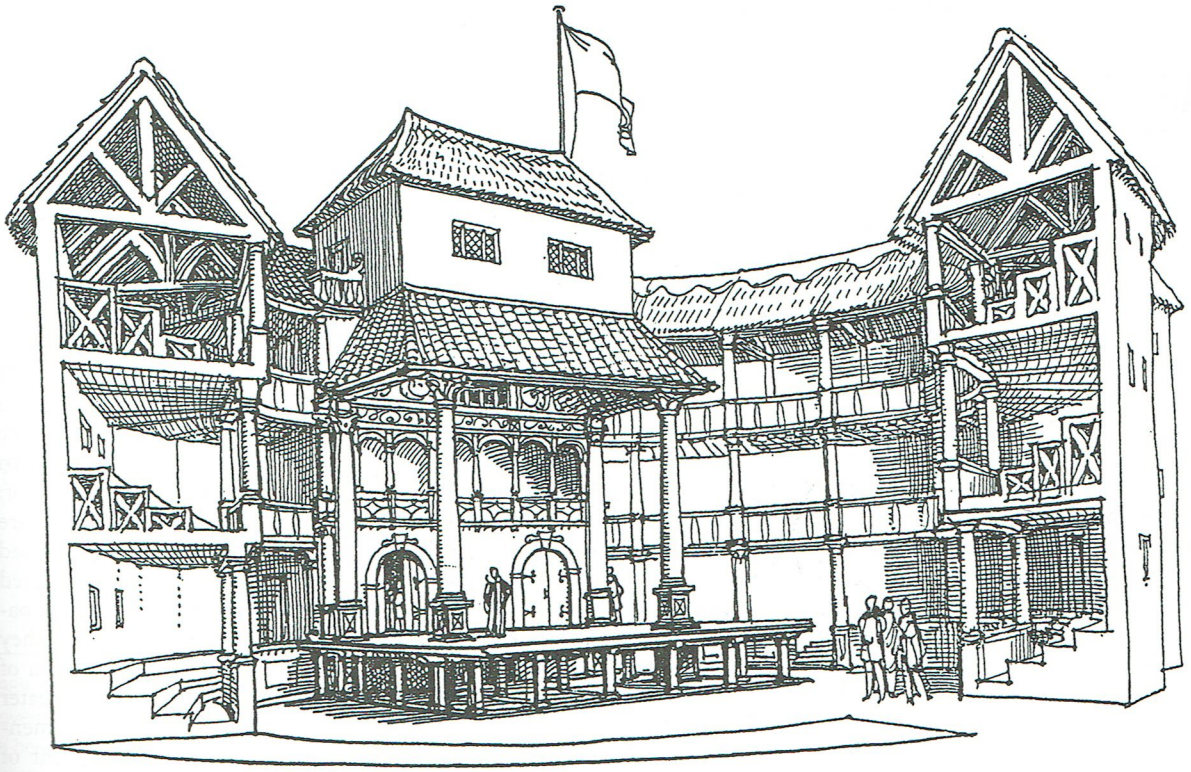
A number of theaters were constructed in London after 1574. The dark line extending from The Tower (lower right) to Blackfriars in the west is the old city wall. Note that, with the exception of the first and second Blackfriars theaters, the theaters are either north of the city (the Fortune, The Theatre, the Curtain, the Red Bull) or south of the Thames River (the Swan, the Hope, the Rose, the Globe). For a sense of scale, the city of London was smaller in area than today's Hyde Park in London, or Central Park in New York.

Sketch of the Swan Theater, 1596



Johannes de Witt, a Dutch visitor to London, drew a sketch of a play in progress at the Swan in 1596. He sent the sketch to a friend, who made this copy. The drawing shows the tiring house with its two stage doors, a three-tiered gallery, the platform stage, and the standing pit.

Modern Reconstruction of the Swan Theater



C. Walter Hodges based this reconstruction on the de Witt sketch.

The Theaters

English companies performed on three kinds of stage—large, open, outdoor buildings called **PUBLIC THEATERS** or **AMPHITHEATERS** that held as many as 3,000 people; smaller, indoor, more elite **PRIVATE THEATERS** or **HALL THEATERS** holding perhaps 700; and private performances at court or at the home of the patron. Public theaters, inspired both by the innyard booths where companies performed on tour and by the circular arenas used for animal baiting, were outdoor buildings accommodating a large and diverse audience for afternoon performances. Although one theater, the Fortune, was rectangular, most public theaters were polygonal structures. The roughly circular, three-story gallery surrounded an open pit for standing audiences, into which a stage extended at a height of about five feet. The stage was partly roofed, and two doors used for entrances were set into the rear wall, or **TIRING HOUSE.** On the gallery level above the stage, small rooms were used for aristocratic seating, for music, and for scenes requiring action above the stage—as in the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet,* or when Prospero appears "aloft" in *The Tempest.* The stage had a central trapdoor (or **GRAVE TRAP**), and its roofed area held a pulley for raising or lowering actors (as in the masque scene in *The Tempest*) or properties. The public theaters catered to a paying audience, charging one penny to enter the pit and an additional penny to enter much of the galleries, where seating was provided on benches. Estimates on the size of the theaters vary, but the largest, such as the Globe or the Fortune, were about 100 feet in external diameter, with a standing yard about 70 feet across, and a stage 45 feet wide and 27 feet deep; they could hold tightly-packed audiences of 2,000 to 3,000 people. Some theaters were considerably smaller. The Rose Theater (whose foundation was discovered in 1989)

(*Aside*)

SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE

One of the most fascinating constellations of scholarly, architectural, and theatrical ambition in recent years has been the building of a replica of the 1613 Globe theater on the banks of the Thames River, a few hundred yards from the site of Shakespeare's original theater. Although a variety of efforts have been made throughout the world to build models of the Globe or other English Renaissance theaters, the Bankside project has been notable for the scrupulousness of its research into the location, size, and materials of the Globe and for the care with which it has been constructed. Within the limits of modern legal requirements (fire laws) and social conventions (accessible bathrooms), "Shakespeare's Globe" has been built both as an experiment in Tudor and Stuart building practices and to foster an experiential experiment in the performance of Renaissance plays.

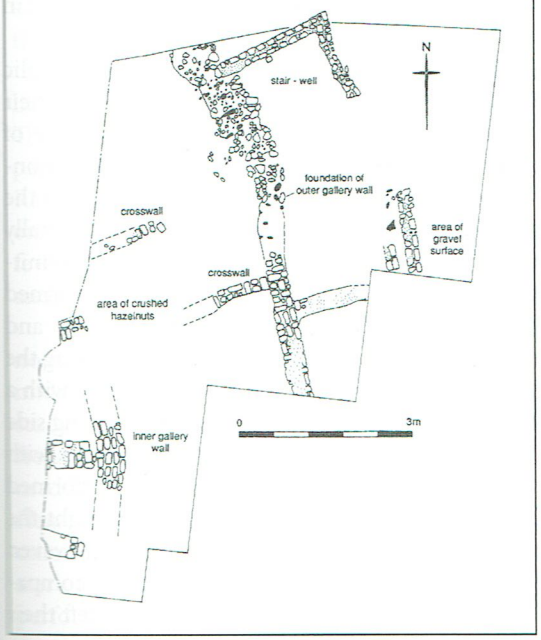
The American actor Sam Wanamaker instigated the project and remained its guiding force until his death in 1993. Part of Wanamaker's vision was that the theater should be both a theatrical and a scholarly endeavor, and much of the success of the final project is due to the team he assembled, including the scholar Andrew Gurr, architect Theo Crosby (who died in 1994), and artistic director Mark Rylance. The accuracy of the building was immeasurably helped by the discovery in 1989 of a section of the Globe's foundation beneath a nineteenth-century building adjacent to the Southwark bridge; although Anchor Terrace is protected as a landmark (preventing much excavation of the Globe's foundation), the section of foundation that has been unearthed has enabled scholars, using the familiar seventeenth-century engraving of the London skyline by Wenceslaus Hollar, to deduce that the Globe was a polygon constructed of twenty bays, with an exterior diameter of 100 feet. However, building the theater as part of the Bankside Globe Centre—which will also include a replica of a theater designed by Inigo Jones and has exhibition and other facilities—was not an easy task, and much of what has been learned about the Globe has been the result of scholarly investigation into Tudor building practices and the efforts to reconstruct them.

Shakespeare's Globe is an impressively handmade building, using traditional building practices: the bays are made of oak timbers and are held together by more than 6,000 wooden pegs. Once the bays were erected, the walls were filled in with oak staves, lath, and then plastered: rather than using modern plaster, research showed that Tudor builders used a plaster made of lime and cow's hair. Because the hair of modern English cows is too short, the new Globe's builders used a lime plaster mixed with goat hair. A fire sheet was put between each wall, and tests on the resulting lath-and-plaster showed that it could resist 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit for three hours—long enough to empty the theater in an emergency (when the Globe burned in 1613, no injuries were reported, either). The building is also the first wood-framed building to be built in London since the great fire of 1666: its thatched roof is applied in the traditional manner and has been treated with a fire-retardant chemical, and a sprinkler system is installed just under the roofline.

By far the most controversial aspect of the building has been the location of the two pillars that hold up the "heavens," and the design of the back wall of the stage, the tiring house wall. Between the Prologue Season (1996) and the Globe's opening in 1997, a variety of changes in both were made, resulting in a sumptuously painted backdrop with additional tapestries, and faux-marble columns. Audiences going to the Globe today find themselves in a theater somewhat less crowded than a full house in Shakespeare's day might have been. Although the original Globe held 3,000, the current Globe seats just over 1,000 and can hold about 500 standing "groundlings" in the pit (today, the average audience member is about 10% larger than his or her Elizabethan predecessor; beyond that, modern audiences are not willing—nor are they allowed by fire regulations—to be jammed together as tightly as Elizabethan patrons probably were). But what they will also find—as the production of *Henry V* in 1997 showed—is a theater operating as a kind of experimental venue, using the instrument of Shakespeare's drama to explore how the plays might have worked in their original conditions. At the present time, the company does some productions in period dress (the costumes often themselves made with Tudor clothmaking and dye techniques), and also sometimes experiments with period accents as well; other productions are not held to this "historical" program. The result of a massive and energetic combination of talents, Shakespeare's Globe is finally meant to work as a living theater.[1] ■

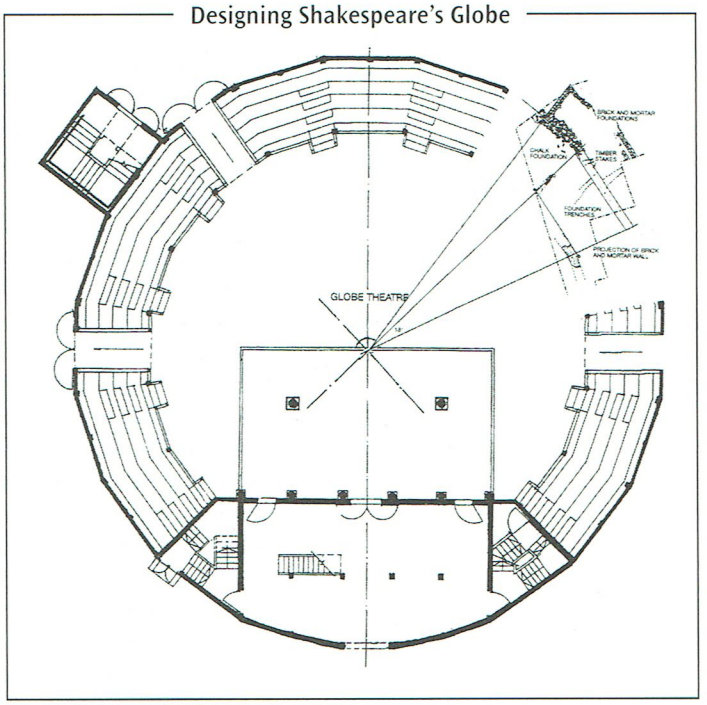
[1]The building of the Globe was recorded in a variety of newspaper and scholarly accounts throughout the early 1990s; students interested in learning more about Shakespeare's Globe should consult Shakespeare's Globe Education Centre, Bankside, London SE1 9DT, United Kingdom.

The Globe Theater Foundation



In 1989, part of the foundation of the Globe theater was discovered. This portion of the Globe foundation extends from beneath a landmark nineteenth-century building; the remainder of the Globe foundation is beneath the building and therefore cannot be excavated. Nonetheless, this section of the inner and outer wall of the theater, and of the exterior stairwell which led to the galleries, has enabled scholars to gauge with much greater accuracy both the size and configuration of Shakespeare's theater.

Designing Shakespeare's Globe



This illustration shows how the archaeological evidence of the Globe theater foundations has been used, along with other evidence, to develop a new understanding of the theater's size and shape. The foundations, which comprise two "bays" or sections of the Globe's exterior structure, enabled Theo Crosby, the architect of the reconstructed Shakespeare's Globe in London, to estimate the overall dimensions of the building (about ninety-nine feet in diameter) and also to determine that the Globe was a twenty-sided polygon.

was a twelve-sided building about 70 feet across, with a pit 50 feet in diameter and a stage roughly 25 by 15 feet. Most of the plays we associate with the Renaissance theater—those of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, John Webster, John Fletcher, and others—were produced in public theaters such as the Globe, the Rose, the Hope, the Swan, and the Fortune.

Although a number of theaters were built in this period, the prestige of the public theaters seems to have declined in the 1620s and 1630s as companies shifted much of their attention to the more lucrative private theaters. These theaters stood within the City of London, on lands called "liberties"; a liberty was a property that had once belonged to monasteries and had remained outside the city's legal jurisdiction, even though it was within the city limit. Best known of these theaters is the Blackfriars playhouse (the property originally belonged to the Dominican friars, who wore black gowns). Blackfriars was used intermittently in the 1590s by boys' companies, troupes of boy chapel choristers who were formed into companies for acting plays. Blackfriars was acquired by James Burbage in 1596, and used by the King's Men for performances after 1608. These theaters were modeled along the lines of a great-house banqueting room: long indoor rooms illuminated by candles, with a low stage at one end, faced by benches for seating and flanked by additional seats along side galleries. The private theaters generally charged sixpence or more for basic admission, with additional charges for special seating in the galleries or on the stage. Companies performed at private theaters in winter and at public theaters in summer and generally brought the same repertoire to both venues. The private theaters did develop the reputation, however, for originating a more satirical and erudite body of drama, including plays by boys' companies like those Rosencrantz describes to Hamlet, explaining why the players have left their usual—and profitable—home in the city.

Drama and Performance

Performing plays in **REPERTORY** over perhaps as many as 200 days a year, the London companies competed with each other for their audiences and generated an enormous demand for new plays. The plays that they bought and performed are among the greatest works of English literature. English drama in this period comprises plays on English history (such as Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Richard III,* or Marlowe's *Edward II*); on classical history (Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus,* Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*); romantic comedies (such as Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*); city comedies (Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*); heroic tragedies (Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *King Lear,* John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*); and plays of intrigue or satire (John Marston's *The Malcontent,* Thomas Middleton's *The Changeling*). Later in the period, audiences seemed to develop a taste for plays they called **TRAGICOMEDIES,** usually romantic plays that begin in the tragic vein but proceed to a happy resolution. Several of John Fletcher's plays are tragicomedies of this kind, and Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* resemble tragicomedy as well.

This list of genres suggests both the fertile range of innovation in the Renaissance theater and the drama's dependence on models drawn from the classical and medieval theaters. Roman drama—the comedies of Plautus and Terence and the tragedies of Seneca—was widely used in schools and universities as part of the teaching of Latin, and university students often staged these plays in Latin. It is not surprising, then, that some features of classical drama made their way into the Renaissance theater. The model of Shakespearean romantic comedy—mistaken identities, separated lovers, an irascible old man or father, a wily servant—derives directly from Plautus's plays; indeed, Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* directly adapts Plautus's *The Brothers Menaechmus* (see Unit 1). In a similar fashion, the violence of Seneca's tragedies makes its way directly into the action of Elizabethan drama. Formally and thematically, however, Renaissance drama also differs sharply from its classical ancestors. Renaissance plays tend to be more diffuse, involving a greater variety of characters and multiple plots; in tragedy, the action is often not quite as closely focused on the fortunes of a single hero as it is in classical tragedy. In these and other ways—in the

Christian providence that seems to stand behind the action of many plays, in its variety of contemporary characters, in its use of symbolic anachronism, and in the complex relationship between the dramatic world and the world of the audience—Renaissance drama bears the signs of its medieval inheritance.

Playwrights generally wrote in **BLANK VERSE**, an unrhymed **IAMBIC PENTAMETER** line (ten syllables with alternating stress), and occasionally used other verse forms as well. They often used prose, sometimes for emphasis, sometimes to develop the qualities of a particular character. Although modern editors divided the plays into five acts, in most cases Renaissance playwrights probably did not compose their plays in this form. Performance on the public theater stage was rapid and continuous. The theaters used an open stage, few large properties, and had little or no scenery onstage, so that scenes could follow one another without interruption.

Despite the absence of elaborate stage sets, performance in the Renaissance theater was nonetheless spectacular. Actors used costumes, properties, and language to transform the midafternoon stage into a dramatic locale—Prospero's desert island, Lear's heath, Faustus's study. Some larger properties could be wheeled out from the rear doors, or perhaps raised from the trap: a throne, for instance, or a bed for Desdemona in *Othello,* or the hell-mouth used at the end of *Doctor Faustus.* A cannon fired during a production of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* in 1613 unfortunately set fire to the Globe and burned it to the ground. The unlocalized stage of medieval drama can be seen as the forerunner of the Renaissance theater's fluid use of stage space. The open stage made for an almost cinematic flexibility in performance, as the play could range rapidly from scene to scene, place to place. Costuming was eclectic and anachronistic: the actors wore mainly Elizabethan clothing, adding armor, royal finery, motley, or some "classical" style of gowns when needed. The actors—Burbage, Alleyn, Will Kemp, among many others—were widely praised for their power and effectiveness. Their acting style was oratorical in tragedy and extemporaneous in comedy, but there is no doubt that many were consummate performers, in command of dozens of roles that could be put into play at short notice.

Women in Drama and Performance

Boy actors played a significant part in the experience of English theater, for boy actors played the parts of women and girls onstage, including major roles like Lady Macbeth, Ophelia, and Cleopatra. Much as they did in classical Athens, "women" emerged onstage in Renaissance London only as a side-effect of masculine attitudes and performances. In the English theater, this **CROSS-DRESSING** came into special prominence, though, because the romantic, sexual, and political intrigue so popular in Renaissance plays was often focused on female characters and therefore on the performance of the boy actors. Indeed, the drama frequently uses cross-dressing as a way of interrogating the power and perquisites of gender, in ways that sometimes confirm and sometimes question the role of gender in English society. English society was an overtly hierarchical one, and despite the power of the "Virgin Queen," women had little access to education, most could not hold property, and they were generally subject to discrimination of many kinds. In this social economy and in a theater in which Puritan opposition to the stage frequently criticized the theater's "effeminacy," the absence of women from the stage became a powerful sign of their absence from other scenes of power. Much as sumptuary laws prevented individuals from wearing jewels and clothing above their social station, so too was cross-dressing a legal offense in sixteenth-century England, punishable by whipping and a prison sentence. The license of the theater, the freedom to create magical new worlds on the stage, was, like other forms of power in the period, the prerogative of men, and the images that men created for the stage are in important ways imprinted with the signs of a specifically masculine imagination. As with all stage conventions, cross-dressing was deeply implicated in the values of the culture outside the theater, so much so that when women did perform onstage in England—a French company used actresses at Blackfriars in 1629—they met with hostility, ridicule, and rejection.

(Aside)

THE JACOBEAN COURT MASQUE

One of the principal obligations of the professional companies was to perform at court or for their patron. Performances at court often took place during holidays and were commanded with increasing frequency by James I and Charles I. The companies performed many of their staple plays at court, but they also performed special entertainments called **MASQUES,** plays written in verse, usually on mythological subjects, that involved dancing, fanciful costumes, music, and special scenic machinery and effects. While the actors spoke the lines in these plays, they shared the stage with members of the court, who performed in the elaborate dances that began, punctuated, and ended the masques. The little play that Prospero puts on for Ferdinand and Miranda in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* resembles court masques in many ways, with its cast of goddesses, its formal singing and dancing, and the ceremonial quality of the occasion it celebrates.

Masques were an elaborate and expensive entertainment; some were performed on special state occasions. Jonson's *Hymenaei* (1605) celebrated the marriage of Lady Essex and *The Masque of Oberon* (1610) was written to celebrate Prince Henry's investiture as Prince of Wales, and all had important implications for the mythology of the Stuart dynasty. Because members of the royal and aristocratic families performed in the masques, the poet was challenged to devise a setting and dramatic narrative that were elevated enough for the courtly audience and to dignify the aristocratic performers. Each masque included several "grand masquing dances," which were performed by members of the court, often costumed as "characters" in the masque.

Jonson was by far the most renowned writer of masques, though the playwrights James Shirley, William Davenant (who became a critically important theater manager after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660), and others also wrote masques. Jonson wrote more than a dozen masques, and in the course of his long career innovated the genre in several ways. While the earlier Stuart masques tend to have a relatively simple narrative, later masques, beginning with *The Masque of Queens* (1609), adopted a more complicated structure. *The Masque of Queens* begins with an **ANTIMASQUE,** a scene involving witches, goblins, or demons who are magically transformed into goddesses or allegorical virtues in the course of the action.

> His majesty, then, being set, and the whole company in full expectation, the part of the scene which first presented itself was an ugly hell, which flaming beneath, smoked unto the top of the roof. And in respect all evils are, morally said to come from hell, . . . these witches, with a kind of hollow and infernal music, came forth from thence. First one, then two, and three, and more, till their number increased to eleven, all differently attired: some with rats on their head, some on their shoulders; others with ointment pots at their girdles; all with spindles, timbrels, rattles or other venefical [having to do with witchcraft] instruments, making a confused noise, with strange gestures.

The witches dance and pronounce a series of charms until, suddenly, "with a strange and sudden music,"

> they fell into a magical dance full of preposterous change and gesticulation. . . . In the heat of their dance on the sudden was heard a sound of loud music, as if many instruments had made one blast; with which not only the hags themselves but the hell into which they ran quite vanished, and the whole face of the scene altered, scarce suffering the memory of such a thing. But in the place of it appeared a glorious and magnificent building figuring the House of Fame, in the top of which were discovered the twelve masquers sitting upon a throne triumphal erected in form of a pyramid and circled with all store of light. From whom a person, by this time descended, in the furniture of Perseus, and expressing heroic and masculine virtue began to speak.[1]

The antimasque establishes a world of demonic disorder, which suddenly vanishes when the members of the court appear in the House of Fame, among classical heroes and virtues. We can get a sense of the delicacy of Jonson's situation when we recognize that the performers of the masque included the queen herself, as well as the countesses of Arundel, Derby, Huntington, Bedford, Essex, and Montgomery, Viscountess Cranborne, and several ladies in waiting. Members of the court were both performers and the audience of this self-enclosed spectacle, which almost of necessity reflected back on its audience an idealized vision of courtly perfection. Indeed, in the last Stuart masque, *Salmacida Spolia,* written by Davenant, both the king and the queen were among the dancers.

As an ambitious writer, Jonson thought the masques were essentially a vehicle for his splendid poetry. But as even this brief description suggests, the masques were highly dependent on the development of new scenic technology and on the skills of the architect and designer Inigo Jones (1573–1652). The masques were unusually expensive: one of King James's masques cost more than £4,000, and one of King Charles's cost £21,000. Much of this money was spent on the

[1]From *Ben Jonson: Selected Masques,* ed. Stephen Orgel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).

elaborate, changeable scenery that accompanied the masques, the first changeable scenery in the English theater. Inigo Jones designed the theater space where masques were performed, the banqueting hall of Whitehall Palace. Jones had visited Italy in 1600; he may have visited again during 1607–1608, and he is known to have been in Italy from 1613 to 1615. In Italy he came into contact with the theater designs of Andrea Palladio (1518–1580), who adapted the design of classical Roman theaters for indoor stages: Palladio's Teatro Olimpico had a curved amphitheater-like auditorium and a proscenium stage. As court architect and designer, Jones had the opportunity both to import Palladio's understanding of theatrical design, and to develop his own interest in elaborate spectacle. The stage at Whitehall was about forty feet wide by twenty-eight feet deep, and gently raked. Although Jones's theater at Whitehall changed during his long tenure at court, it eventually consisted of staggered wings and a backdrop to convey a sense of perspective. Unlike both the public and private theaters of Renaissance London, Jones's theater was the first to use changeable scenery, and when the theaters reopened in 1660, the English companies brought this aristocratic inheritance with them: Jones's **WINGS-AND-BACKDROP** designs became the basic model for changeable scenery throughout the eighteenth century.

Jones's interest in spectacle was far reaching, and he devised the instruments to execute many of Jonson's most elaborate poetic images: flying machines, a globe that opened to reveal several aristocratic dancers, and brilliant costumes to dress the masques' allegorical characters. But it was Jones's development of a perspective in the theater that was most deeply implicated in the rhetoric of court life. At Whitehall performances, the King sat on a raised, central dais directly in front of the stage; since none of the other courtiers could be seated with their backs to the King, those closer to the stage were seated along the side walls of the room, while others were seated behind the royal spectator. It has been argued that the king was positioned in a complex relation to the stage and to the rest of the audience: not only was he the only spectator for whom the illusion of perspective was complete (the other spectators could probably see between the wings, for example), but the rest of the audience could *see* that only the king had a perfect vision of the world onstage. The closer one sat to the royal seat, the more one's view of the illusion onstage approximated the king's ideal vantage. Spectators and performers, in other words, engaged in a richly hierarchical sense of illusion in which the King's centrality—and, in a sense, his omniscience—was constantly displayed, and each spectator's distance from that sense of illusion was constantly experienced. Like Jonson, whose texts frequently betray his intense awareness of his royal audience and aristocratic performers, Jones's perspective theater reflects the increasingly absolutist ideology of the Stuart monarchy.

Fiery Spirit

Inigo Jones created this costume for a fiery spirit in 1635.

The banqueting hall at Whitehall played one more ironic role in the history of performance. Charles I became increasingly hostile to Parliament—he refused to call Parliament from 1629 to 1640—and when civil war broke out in 1642, Charles fled London. The Royalist forces were concentrated in Oxford, and in 1647 Charles was defeated and captured by the Parliamentary army. In 1649, he was sentenced to death by Parliament, and he visited the Whitehall banquet hall on his way to his execution. The executioner's block was set on a large public stage outside a window of the banquet hall; Charles was led through the room where the masques' brilliant fantasies had been staged for him to his own last performance—the public stage where he was beheaded. ■

Costumes for Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*

Dating from about 1595, this drawing appears to show a scene from *Titus Andronicus,* by William Shakespeare. Two of the actors wear pseudoclassical Roman costumes; the others are dressed in Elizabethan clothing.

Nonetheless, women not only attended the theater, but a few—aristocratic women, who often patronized poets and other artists—also wrote plays, and sometimes performed in them at court. Queen Elizabeth is thought to have translated a passage from Seneca's *Hercules on Mount Oeta,* and other women similarly adapted or wrote plays. Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke and sister of Sir Philip Sidney, translated Robert Garnier's play *The Tragedy of Antonie* in the 1590s. Her niece, Lady Mary Wroth (daughter of Mary Sidney's brother, Robert, and a frequent participant in Jacobean court masques), wrote a mythological play, *Love's Victory,* probably in the early 1620s. Perhaps the best-known plays today are Elizabeth Cary, Viscountess of Falkland's *Tragedy of Miriam* (published in 1613) and the plays published by Margaret Cavendish, Marchioness of Newcastle, in 1662 and 1668. Although these plays were not staged—aristocratic women did not traffic in theater business—they have since become a critical part of our understanding of English Renaissance drama.

The theater had an extraordinary hold on the English imagination. In their many progresses, pageants, and allegorical entertainments, the English monarchs revealed a keen sense of the power of fictive images to represent reality, or a version of it, and so to shape their subjects' understanding of royal power. Playwrights and audiences also found in the theater a magical image of human possibility. Think of Prospero summoning the storm, Ariel, and other spirits with his stagey magic; or of the playwright John Webster's description of "an excellent actor": "All men have been of his occupation, and indeed what he doth feignedly, that do others essentially: this day one plays a Monarch, the next a private person. Here one acts a Tyrant, on the morrow an Exile; a Parasite [sponger] this man tonight, tomorrow a Precisian [Puritan], and so of divers others." Acting and the theater provided a liberating image of human—or, at least, masculine—power: the power to transform oneself and the world. However, the rich, strange, transforming freedom of the theater could also seem empty and terrifying, even demonic. Rather than an image of human potential, the theater could seem to offer an image of the poverty of human action, the sterile and

deceptive emptiness of the world we make and inhabit. As King Lear preaches to blinded Gloucester, "When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools." Puritan critics of the theater insistently reminded audiences that the stage's methods—to seduce with the vain and showy image of a false reality—were also Satan's, and that the theater subversively invited audiences to "unman, unChristian, uncreate themselves." Yet it is precisely this transforming power that lies at the heart of the Renaissance theater's fascination for its audience. Although the theater sometimes seemed to depict a world threatened with constant change and loss, it also presented the power of illusion to recreate the real.

Medieval and Renaissance Drama in Performance and History

Although the banning of the cycle dramas in England in the sixteenth century marked an ending of the traditions of medieval drama and theater there, the same was not true on the continent, where both cycle dramas and morality dramas continued to be performed. In Spain, for example, the AUTOS SACRAMENTALES—morality plays on Christian themes—were produced in major cities such as Madrid, and had an important influence on dramatic writing as well (see Unit IV). Similarly, staging short pageants—like the shepherd plays or *pastorelas* performed today throughout Latin America, and in many Latino communities in the United States, before Christmas—has remained a part of religious festivities in many places; perhaps the most striking of these is the processional staging of the Passion held in Oberammergau, Germany.

In many respects, though, the vivid and popular style of the cycle plays had to wait until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to find an audience; when the manuscripts of the four English cycles first began to be studied seriously in the nineteenth century, their plays were seen merely as primitive precursors to the more finished, literary achievement of English Renaissance dramatists. However, this model of the "evolution" of dramatic forms, from "simple" to "complex," is not really borne out by a close examination of the plays themselves, which use a popular literary and theatrical medium to undertake a drama of enormous subtlety, scope, and power. Beginning in the twentieth century, a number of efforts were made to stage medieval drama—both the cycle plays and morality plays, such as *Everyman*—and the force and theatrical vitality of the plays became immediately apparent. In recent years, the cycle plays have been staged frequently, both in their traditional locations (at York, for instance), and elsewhere: the University of Toronto and the Court Theater at the University of Chicago have mounted very well received versions.

Although the English theaters were closed in 1642, interrupting the practices both of playwriting and of theatrical performance, the secular drama of Renaissance England has had in many respects a more sustained tradition. When the theaters reopened in 1660, they reopened in a very different form—indoor theaters, using lights and stage machinery, replaced the outdoor public theaters of the Jacobean and Caroline periods—and to a much more narrowly circumscribed audience (see Unit IV). And while there was considerable demand for new plays, for many years some plays of the Renaissance period held the stage, and indeed provided the dramatic conventions on which new plays were mapped. While today we tend to think of Shakespeare as the preeminent writer of his era, in the Restoration period, Shakespeare's plays were revived less frequently than those of other playwrights, notably Ben Jonson, James Shirley, and Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher; it was only in the eighteenth century that Shakespeare's plays began to have something approaching their current popularity.

The history of Shakespeare in the theater, however, is a history of adaptation: the concept that Shakespeare's plays have an inner logic and should be performed "as they were written" is a purely modern idea. Shakespeare's plays were, of course, altered in the practice of his own company, and playwrights in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries adapted the plays to the taste of their era. John Dryden, for example, transformed

Shakespeare's erotically supercharged Antony and Cleopatra into an honorable Roman and his staid matron in his version of *Antony and Cleopatra,* called *All for Love* (1677). Nahum Tate's version of Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1681) concludes with Edgar marrying Cordelia (yes, she lives) and retiring happily offstage with Lear (he lives, too) and Kent; this version of *Lear* held the stage well into the nineteenth century. Rather than regarding these revisions as quaintly misguided, we should recognize that theatrical production always rewrites the drama in the idiom of the day; to their audiences, these productions were fully "Shakespearean," just as films—Kenneth Branagh's setting of *Hamlet* in the nineteenth century, Baz Luhrmann's framing *Romeo and Juliet* as a gang war in a Latin American Verona, or Michael Almereyda's use of Ethan Hawke as an alienated, technologically adept modern New Yorker in his *Hamlet*—are efforts to make Shakespeare speak in ways that will be powerful to audiences today.

Indeed, today we tend to think of Shakespeare across a variety of media: in film and television and advertising as well as in a range of theatrical venues. But for the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, Shakespeare was the property of the theater, and many actors and actresses became famous for their portrayals of Shakespearean roles: Thomas Betterton (1635–1710), Charles Macklin (1700–1797), Sarah Siddons (1755–1831), Edmund Kean (1789–1833), Sir Henry Irving (1838–1905), the first English actor to be knighted, and Ellen Terry (1847–1928) are just a few. In many respects, though, David Garrick (1717–1779) had the greatest impact as a Shakespearean actor. In part through his celebrated performances—he was renowned as Hamlet, Macbeth, and Richard III—Garrick helped to create a new interest in Shakespeare in the theater: he had his portrait painted frequently in Shakespearean roles (Hogarth's painting of Garrick as Richard III is a famous example), and he used his popularity to advance Shakespeare's reputation, not least by staging a Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford. Garrick was a friend of the great literary critic Samuel Johnson, and Garrick's efforts in the theater coincided with a series of attempts to produce better, more accurate editions of Shakespeare's plays. But although Garrick had the reputation of restoring "Shakespeare's" original texts to the stage, he could hardly hope to succeed in the face of a century of popular stage adaptations. Although Garrick did introduce some Shakespearean material that had previously been cut from performances, his King Lear survived the play just as Nahum Tate's did, and his Richard III bawled out—as he had ever since Colley Cibber revised the play in 1700—"Off with his head!" (Indeed, Cibber's version of *Richard III* cuts several characters and persisted onstage well into the twentieth century; it also partly informs Laurence Olivier's film of the play.)

The stage production of Shakespearean drama has always responded to the beliefs and values of its contemporary audiences. Tate's adaptation of *King Lear* was praised by Johnson, for example, for its happy ending seemed to restore justice in the theater; Johnson thought Shakespeare's original ending fine for readers, but too bleak and destructive for the stage. Shakespeare's plays were adapted to the more melodramatic and sentimental tastes of the eighteenth century; in the nineteenth century, a vogue for historical accuracy and stage realism led to a series of splendid efforts to reconstruct the historical setting of the plays: medieval Scotland in Charles Kean's 1853 *Macbeth* or Christian-era England in Henry Irving's *Cymbeline* (1896). These changes in taste are reflected in acting style as well: Betterton's portrayal of Hamlet was renowned in the late seventeenth century for its gravity and grace; Betterton is said never to have raised his arms above his waist, an illustration of neoclassical decorum in performance. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge remarked that watching Edmund Kean in performance was akin to reading Shakespeare "by flashes of lightning"; Kean's performance impressed his audiences precisely through his well-crafted *lack* of decorum, in accord with Romantic beliefs about emotional expressivity. Irving is in many ways the first modern actor in what we would recognize as a psychological tradition

of acting; although his career preceded the Russian director Constantin Stanislavski's pioneering work on the style of realistic performance (see Unit V), Irving's penchant for subtle physical details of characterization—his enemies called them mannerisms—gave his work a psychological concreteness and complexity that was powerful to an audience whose understanding of dramatic character was trained on the novels of Charles Dickens and George Eliot.

The theater also registers its culture's changing social attitudes in its portrayal of Shakespearean roles. Charles Macklin, for example, was probably the first actor to take a more sympathetic portrayal of the Jewish moneylender Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice;* the role had traditionally been performed as a satiric stereotype. Yet even Macklin retained the comic red wig and beard with which Shylock had always been performed; Edmund Kean was the first actor to get rid of them. Henry Irving's production of the play ended after the Act IV trial scene: in his version, *The Merchant of Venice* becomes something more like "The Tragedy of Shylock." In 1994, Peter Sellars set the play in a version of Los Angeles and drew explicit parallels to the police beating of Rodney King and the uprising that followed the acquittal of the officers involved. In Sellars's production the play's Jews were all played as African Americans; the Venetians were all played as Latinos and Latinas; and Portia and her retinue were all played as Asian Americans. Although Sellars's production was deservedly controversial, it illustrates a sense that Shakespeare's drama is capable of entering into new situations unimagined by Shakespeare, and of saying new things as well.

In the twentieth century, the pictorial style favored by Victorian theaters has largely been replaced in an effort to stage the plays in the simpler style of Shakespeare's theater. The first experiments of this kind were undertaken by William Poel (1852–1934), who used his Elizabethan Stage Society to produce versions of *Twelfth Night* and other plays on an open stage, and using a text more closely approximating Shakespeare's. Poel made it possible to see Shakespeare's plays as lively and fast-moving (all those scene changes in Victorian productions had made a Shakespeare play a very long evening, requiring many cuts to compensate for all the time it took to raise and lower sets), and regardless of whether directors (a new role in the theater also dating to this period) have chosen to stage the plays in Elizabethan or other settings, the sense of a rapidly changing series of scenes, localized not by extensive sets onstage but by the language and action, informs most twentieth-century Shakespeare. Indeed, one way to measure the distance between the early twentieth and mid-twentieth centuries would be to compare Beerbohm Tree's 1900 London production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—which featured live rabbits onstage in a meticulously constructed "forest"—with Peter Brook's landmark 1970 version, which set the play in a white box onstage, casting the fairies as acrobats on trapezes.

It is now possible to see a range of Shakespeares on the contemporary stage—not only Shakespeare performed in languages other than English, but through the eclectic range of theatrical styles characteristic of the modern stage. Some productions—the "restored" versions, such as the 1997 *Henry V,* at Shakespeare's Globe in London—work hard to use Elizabethan costumes to produce the flavor of Shakespeare's theater. Other productions set the plays in a different historical era (there have been several recent *Henry V* productions set in the American Civil War, for example) to make the workings of the play's society visible to us in more familiar circumstances. Still others use eclectic staging, combining set and costume elements from a variety of periods to take Shakespeare out of history—in the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1991 *Troilus and Cressida,* for example, Agamemnon appeared in a breastplate and a ratty old cardigan sweater: a kind of timeless image of the doddering old general; the RSC's 2005 *Tempest* relocated the play in time and space, to an arctic shipwreck sometime in the early twentieth century. Shakespeare has also been a prominent site of **INTERCULTURAL PERFORMANCE** investigation, an effort to bring about a dialogue between what is often a "colonial" text and "indigenous" performance traditions: this is

READING THE MATERIAL THEATER

One of the most chastening facts concerning the early modern theater is that most of the drama performed on its stages has been lost: plays were given to the theater companies in handwritten manuscript; they were copied out by hand into parts—scrolls containing each actor's part, with cues for each of his speeches—and the copy of the play maintained by the company was, likewise, a handwritten copy. Needless to say, nearly all such manuscripts have been lost.

Although by the later sixteenth century typesetting was a familiar technology in Renaissance England, the proliferation of printed documents—volumes of classical Latin texts, broadsides, ballads, religious pamphlets, guides to domestic work, conduct books for courtiers—presented Shakespeare's audiences with an information explosion much akin to the one we face in the digital age. At the same time, print was not understood to be an appropriate vehicle for all forms of writing. Poets, for example, saw print—associated with the declassé mercantile world of commerce—as an inferior mode for circulating their poems: to gain the kind of aristocratic prestige (and patronage) they most desired, poets typically circulated their poems in manuscript among the aristocrats at court.

Nonetheless, plays were published, increasingly with elaborate prefatory material laying claim to the play's literary merit, even sometimes claiming—as is the case with the version of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* published in 1609—that the play was never actually performed. Plays were generally published in a small, inexpensive format; because the sheet of paper on which the text is printed is folded twice (into four) before the book is bound, these small books are known bibliographically as **QUARTOS**. It's not entirely clear what incentive either printers or theatre companies might have had to publish plays; it remains controversial whether a printer could have made any money from a quarto play, though quarto editions of plays were published with increasing regularity after 1594, sometimes going into several editions. Although there was no copyright protection, theatre companies had little to fear from the publication of one of their plays: plays were licensed by the Master of Revels to an individual company, so staging a printed play approved for another company would have been a very big risk. What seems to be the case is that the emerging industry of print was, in a sense, conceptually independent of the stage: plays seem to have had a rather different identity in each location, and while some playwrights (Jonson, George Chapman, John Webster) seem to have taken considerable care with even the quarto publication of their plays, others—notably Shakespeare—seem to have given little attention to the accuracy and quality of these books. Because of their size, the sometimes slipshod character of their presswork, and their association with the theater, quarto volumes of plays were also stigmatized; Sir Thomas Bodley—whose library, the Bodleian, remains the Oxford University library—famously refused to purchase such "idle rifferaffes" for his collection. Since quarto-sized volumes of individual plays were usually published in very small quantities, they are today quite rare. While over 300 copies of the folio-size collection of Shakespeare's plays remain, only two (slightly different) copies of the 1603 quarto of *Hamlet* are known to exist, and only five copies of the much-superior 1604 second quarto.

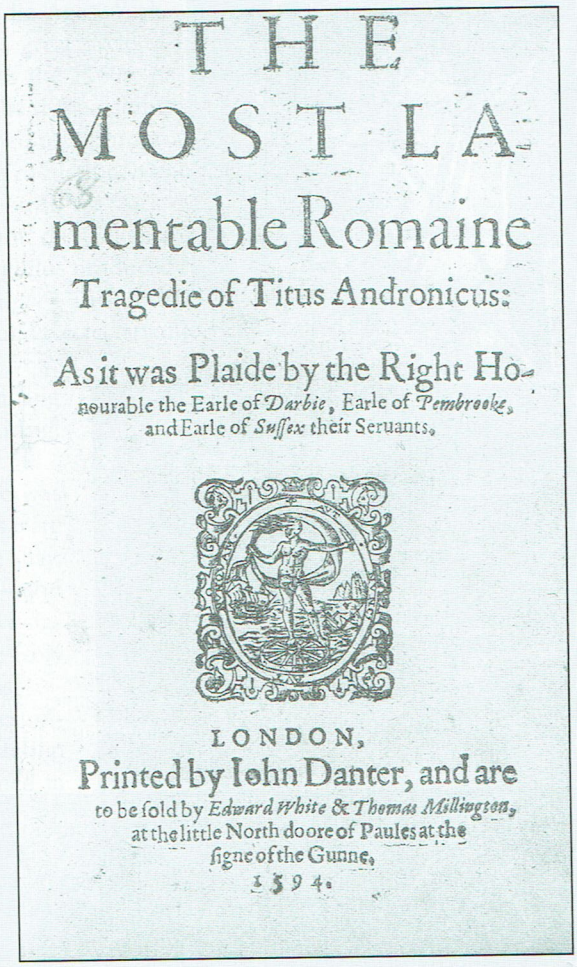
Many of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto form during his lifetime (*Hamlet,* for example), but nearly half of his plays—including *Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, The Tempest,* and others—would be unknown to us without the efforts of two of his fellow-sharers, John Heminges and Henry Condell, who published a nearly complete collection of Shakespeare's plays (in the large-size **FOLIO** format) in 1623, seven years after the playwright's death. This was a signal event in the history of dramatic publishing—in 1623, only one other English dramatist, Ben Jonson, had published a collected *Works* on this scale.

the dialectic animating several superb recent performances, notably the *Kathakali King Lear,* performed at Shakespeare's Globe Theater in 1999, and the work of Ong Keng Sen's Theatreworks Company of Singapore, notably *King Lear* (1997) and *Desdemona* (2000), productions that mix a range of Asian languages and performance styles.

Of course, the ability of the modern stage to bring a great technological flexibility to Shakespeare is matched by the possibilities of film. Shakespeare plays were among the first subjects of silent filmmakers, and many of the most distinguished films of the twentieth century are versions of Shakespearean drama. Indeed, contemporary

READING THE MATERIAL THEATER

We can learn a lot about the condition of the theater and about the relationship between theater practice and the emerging norms of print culture by closely examining the printed texts of Shakespeare's plays in both quarto and folio versions. Here, for example, is the title page of *Titus Andronicus,* one of Shakespeare's earliest successes, a play that has been adapted for film by the director and designer Julie Taymor, and a play that testifies to the fascination that Senecan drama held for playwrights and audiences in the 1580s and 1590s. It is a violent, rhetorically rich play. What can we learn about the theater, and about Renaissance attitudes toward theater, drama, and literature, from this title page? Some aspects to consider: How is the page designed? What are its most prominent visual features? How are different typefaces used to highlight different kinds of information? How is the book designed to appeal to a potential purchaser? What elements are visually prominent and which are less prominent? Is there information missing that might seem necessary to a modern purchaser? How can we read the information presented here as an index of the relation between two newly emerging industries—professional theater and literary publishing—in the period? ■



THE
MOST LA-
mentable Romaine
Tragedie of Titus Andronicus:
As it was Plaide by the Right Ho-
nourable the Earle of *Darbie*, Earle of *Pembrooke*,
and Earle of *Suffex* their Seruants.

LONDON,
Printed by Iohn Danter, and are
to be ſold by *Edward White & Thomas Millington*,
at the little North doore of Paules at the
ſigne of the Gunne,
1594.

Title page of Titus Andronicus.

students of Shakespeare are often much more likely to see a Shakespeare film than a live Shakespeare performance, especially with the number of exciting Shakespeare films produced in the 1990s: Kenneth Branagh in *Henry V, Much Ado About Nothing,* and *Hamlet;* Ian McKellan in *Richard III;* Mel Gibson in *Hamlet;* Leonardo Di Caprio and Claire Danes in *Romeo + Juliet.* As a part of the common cultural inheritance of the West—and indeed, frequently challenged as such by resistant, postcolonial productions in India, Canada, Africa, and elsewhere—Shakespeare is produced today across the spectrum of performance.