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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ELIZABETHAN STAGING TECHNIQUES

OF GEORGE PIERCE BAKER AND WILLIAM POEL

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ELIZABETHAN STAGING TECHNIQUES OF GEORGE PIERCE BAKER AND WILLIAM POEL

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ABSTRACT

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ELIZABETHAN STAGING TECHNIQUES OF GEORGE PIERCE BAKER AND WILLIAM POEL

By

William Hutson

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, attempts were made to produce the plays of Shakespeare as originally performed. These attempts, usually reactions against the scenic embellishments of the Romantic Period, were made by a handful of pioneers in Shakespearean reform. This dissertation compares the Elizabethan staging techniques of two such individuals, George Pierce Baker in America, and William Poel in England.

The careers of Baker and Poel were quite different. The purpose of the dissertation is not to compare every aspect of their careers, or to do an in-depth study of their lives. Their Elizabethan staging remains the primary concern. The study compares the techniques of two men who, although they shared similar ideas, were motivated by different objectives.

George Pierce Baker was primarily a scholar. As a Harvard professor, he sought the instigation of a university theatre curriculum. His attempts at Elizabethan staging, therefore, demonstrated the importance of such a program. William Poel

worked as a theatre practitioner, an actor as well as director. For over fifty years, he actively sought to reform the staging of Elizabethan plays. His objective was Shakespearean drama in its original form.

Chapter I outlines the careers of Baker and Poel. Chapter II reviews Elizabethan staging, both illusionistic and non-illusory, representative of the nineteenth century. Chapters III and IV contrast the theories and then the practices of Elizabethan staging for both Baker and Poel. Chapter V compares the London Hamlet staged by Poel in 1900 with the Harvard Hamlet staged by Baker in 1904. The study attempts to discover how the motivations of each director affected the play as produced. Results are determined by critical response and each director's assessment of his work.

From these comparisons, conclusions are drawn concerning their objectives. Were Poel's objectives more concerned with histrionic reform than Baker's? Were Baker's objectives more archaeological in nature? Conclusions are also drawn concerning the objectives of actor as opposed to scholar in Shakespearean production. The dissertation is important because it demonstrates the collaboration between theatre and scholarship necessary in staging Elizabethan drama.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1800, the typical theatre in both England and America still possessed structures inherited directly from the Elizabethan playhouse; it had a sizeable apron stage derived from the Elizabethan platform, and two proscenium doors on either side of the apron, derived from Elizabethan stage doors. By 1880, however, a drastic change in architecture had occurred; the proscenium doors had disappeared, and the apron was so curtailed as to be negligible. As a result, actors withdrew from the audience and performed in a setting framed by the proscenium arch. Along with this change, scenic artists began designing elaborate pictorial settings. Technical achievements increased the drive toward pictorial illusion and scenic splendor, and audiences flocked to see the latest vehicles provided for the leading actors of the day.

Although Shakespeare remained a popular playwright during the nineteenth century, alterations to his plays were severe. Texts were often cut and transposed by directors and theatre-managers in order to incorporate the latest technical innovations and scenic accomplishments of the new playhouses. For example, Shakespeare's descriptive passages were often considered unnecessary in light of pictorial illusion, and scenes

were slashed or even rearranged to accommodate endless changes of scene. "By the end of the nineteenth century the scenic artist not only offered pictorial competition to the actor and his words but imposed on Shakespearean production a slower tempo than it had ever known before."[1]

Despite the popular trend in illusionistic staging, several attempts were made throughout the nineteenth century to produce the plays of Shakespeare as originally presented. These attempts were isolated incidents, however, and it was not until the turn of the century that a handful of pioneers in Shakespearean reform began to stage regular revivals of his plays. This dissertation examines and compares the Elizabethan staging techniques of two such individuals, George Pierce Baker in America, and William Poel in England.

The careers of Baker and Poel were quite different. The purpose of the dissertation is not to compare every aspect of their careers, or to do an in-depth study of each man's life. Their Elizabethan staging techniques, including both theory and practice, is the primary concern. The study compares the techniques of two men who, although they had similar ideas regarding Elizabethan drama, were motivated by different objectives.

George Pierce Baker was primarily a scholar. As a Harvard professor, he sought the instigation of a theatre

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[1]William A. Armstrong, "The Art of Shakespearean Production in the Twentieth Century," Essays and Studies (London: John Murray), XV (1962), p. 75.

curriculum for the university. His attempts at Elizabethan staging, therefore, demonstrated the purpose and importance of such a program. Baker believed that staging Elizabethan drama "provides something of a literary laboratory for testing certain ideas about the Elizabethan public theatre."[2]

William Poel was a man of the theatre, an actor as well as director. In a career which spanned over fifty years, he actively sought to reform the staging of Elizabethan plays. His objective was the production of Shakespearean drama in its original form.

> If a theatre were established in this country for the performance of Shakespeare's plays with the simplicity and rapidity with which they were acted in his time, it might limit the endless experiments, mutilations, and profitless discussions that every revival occasions.[3]

Although Baker was unable to stage as many plays as Poel, his staging achievements were significant enough for a valid comparison. The dissertation compares the London production of Hamlet staged by Poel in 1900 with the Harvard Hamlet staged by Baker in 1904. The study attempts to discover how the different motivations and objectives of each director affected the play as produced. The results are determined by critical response as well as each director's assessment of his work.

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[2]Wisner Payne Kinne, George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 60.

[3]William Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1913), p. 18.

From these comparisons, conclusions are drawn concerning the objectives of each man. Were Poel's objectives more concerned with histrionic reform than Baker's? Were Baker's objectives more archaeological in nature; did he wish to create the mere structure of an Elizabethan theatre experience? Conclusions are also drawn concerning the objectives of the actor as opposed to the scholar in the production of Shakespeare. The dissertation compares Elizabethan staging as produced for the public and for the university, to discover the effect of the objectives of each on the play as performed, and to understand more clearly the relationship between theatre and scholarship.

> In truth the actor's and the scholar's gifts must help each other out where Shakespeare is concerned, and both are essential if the plays are to be so presented as to reveal the true "form and pressure" of Shakespeare's intention. Except in and through the actor the scholar cannot properly "realize" Shakespeare, any more than even the best musician can judge the full impact of a symphony from reading the score or an engineer assess the performance of a machine from its blueprint. . . . But the scholar is equally indispensable to the actor, for however unchanging this essential quality of "theatre" the theatrical modes that Shakespeare employs, and especially that of language, are over three hundred years old.[4]

Format and Terminology

Chapter I outlines the careers of Baker and Poel. Chapter II reviews Elizabethan staging, both illusionistic and non-illusory, in the nineteenth century. The next two chapters contrast the theories and then the practices of

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[4]Richard David, "Actors and Scholars: A View of Shakespeare in the Modern Theatre," Shakespeare Survey (Cambridge: University Press), XII (1959), p. 77.

Elizabethan staging for both Baker and Poel. This division is necessary, for despite what they held in theory, the two men were often unable to put their ideas into practice. The final chapter, which compares their productions of Hamlet, is followed by conclusions concerning their accomplishments in view of their motivations and objectives. Chapters I, II, and IV follow a chronological listing of events. Chapters III and V, however, examine each director's approach to certain aspects of the production process: the text, physical stage, staging, technical elements, acting, audience, and the critical response to the production.

Most of these aspects, which are discussed in the order usually encountered by a director in the production process, are self-explanatory. However, some may need clarification. The stage, of course, refers to the physical structure. The staging includes not only the director's interpretation and vision of the play, but the actual mounting process; in other words, putting the play on the stage. The technical elements are those stage appointments, or sometimes effects, either called for in the text or deemed necessary by the director. Finally, the critical response includes reactions and comments made by audience members, professional reviewers, as well as those involved in the production.

Sources for the dissertation include university and public libraries, library collections, and letters of correspondence. Primary sources were consulted whenever possible. The Michigan State University library served as a main source

of information, although material was utilized from the Boston Public Library; University of Chicago; California State University, Long Beach; Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Louisiana State University, New Orleans; University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; University of Nebraska, Lincoln and Omaha; State Library of Michigan; and the University of Detroit. Other sources include the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Harvard Theatre Collection and the Harvard Archives, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Correspondence was conducted with Dr. William P. Halstead, University of Michigan; Dr. Charles H. Shattuck, University of Illinois; and Eileen Robinson, Theatre Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Chapter I

THE CAREERS OF BAKER AND POEL

George Pierce Baker

George Pierce Baker was born April 4, 1866, in Providence, Rhode Island, the only child of Dr. George Pierce Baker, Sr. and the former Lucy Cady. Dr. Baker, a literary student under Oliver Wendell Holmes, provided his son with a desire to emulate the writings of Longfellow and Emerson, while his mother imparted a love for the theatre. During a year of illness which postponed the boy's first year of school, the Bakers gave their son a toy theatre. These small theatre models, popular in England in the late nineteenth century, imitated the theatres of Edmund Kean, Charles Kemble, and William Macready. The toy theatre was later succeeded by a small but real stage, built in an upstairs room of the Bakers' residence, and it was here that George began to perform recitations and improvisations. One of the young girls who visited him at the Baker home in the 1870's recalls, "a certain distinctive quality about his bearing even as a child.

There was something grand about George, something superior in his very precise enunciation."[1] The toy theatre and its drama became a symbol of the boy's happiness. Even in his college days there were inquiries for it in his letters to his father. And after his own four sons had outgrown his childhood toy, Baker kept it in the attic of his summer home in New Hampshire.

During the centennial year of 1876, when he was ten years old, George P. Baker, Jr. embarked with his parents on a side-wheel steamer for New York, where they went by train to the great world fair. This was an era of tremendous strides in scientific advancement which must have made its impression upon the boy. Standing with his father before the new Corliss Steam Engine, Baker first saw the dramatic genius of American technology which, a half century later, he took for the theme of his own drama, Control.

Beside the rail and ship routes between New York and Boston, Providence was usually an overnight stop for actors and entertainers who moved between those centers of American theatre activity. Therefore, the Bakers and other Providence residents saw a surprising quantity of stage entertainments for a city of fewer than one hundred thousand people. In the year Baker was born, it had the reputation of being one of the most active theatre towns in America. Two years later,

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[1]Wisner Payne Kinne, George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre (New York: Greenwood Press, 1954), p. 4. I am indebted to Kinne's work on the life of George Pierce Baker for much of the material in this section of Chapter I.

in 1868, Charles Blake's account of the Providence stage became the first published history of an American city stage outside Boston and New York.[2]

The Providence theatres were an active part of Baker's youthful environment. It was the Providence Opera House, however, which gave the boy his idea of the very nature of theatre. He later recalled his earliest memory of any stage in a speech to the National Institute of Social Sciences.

> I knew the theatre first, I think, at the age of six. Then in early but intense recognition of the genius of Charlotte Cushman as Meg Merrilies, I was, for the good of the public, removed shrieking from the theatre.[3]

It is probable that the boy attended a performance at the Providence Opera House a few months after its opening, and even more likely that Dr. and Mrs. Baker were present at the opening night of the theatre. The first play presented was Fashion by the American playwright, Anna Cora Mowatt. However, the theatrical fare upon which the boy matured was foreign rather than native. The plays he saw were largely of three types: English comedy, adaptations of French melodrama and comedy, and a few American plays about provincial characters in rural or frontier settings. The usual routine at the Opera House was a brief farce curtain raiser, followed by the main attraction, and concluded with some light afterpiece.

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[2]Charles Blake, An Historical Account of the Providence Stage (Providence: George H. Whitney, 1868).

[3]George Pierce Baker, "Forty Years of the Drama - A Retrospect," The National Institute of Social Sciences Journal, XII (November, 1927), p. 14.

The average Providence theatre-goer went to the Opera House to be amused.

Mowry and Goff's, Providence's leading private school, was distinguished by an emphasis upon the reading of English and American literature. Baker's first teacher was Mrs. Harriette M. Miller, a woman whose special subject was elocution. With her he began to acquire his mastery as a reader. Later in Baker's life, it was Harley Granville-Barker who said, "I never heard anyone read Shakespeare so well as George Pierce Baker."[4] Mrs. Miller's objective was a new style, popular at the time, of suiting the sound of words to their sense in order to insure naturalness. Since the Civil War, Edwin Booth had progressed from the ranting style of his father's generation of actors to a more natural form of delivery. Thus the boy's training in elocution reflected the general trend among the orators and actors of his day.

Baker attended the new Providence High School and did fairly well his first year, although a mark in English composition placed him below the top rank. However, he was proficient in declamation and became a member of the Debating Society and the Duodecim Club, a literary dozen interested in the arts. In his last year, George founded, along with his friend, Harry Cook, the Providence High School Athletic Association and the Register, for many years the school's weekly paper. In one of his last editorials during high school Baker stated, "There is a great mistake made by many

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[4]Kinne, p. 7.

in reading so much trashy fiction and so very little good, solid truth. One of the most important parts of a good education is one's reading; that is, if it be the right kind, otherwise it is a hindrance rather than a help."[5] These days his most devoted audience was his mother. Now confined to her bed, she listened to his newspaper articles, the light verse he had begun to write, and the speech for his graduation ceremony. He was just seventeen when she died in 1883.

In 1876, while Baker was learning elocution from Mrs. Miller, the resident stock company at the Providence Opera House disbanded and was replaced by repertory companies from Daly's Theatre in New York and the Boston Museum; by touring companies which starred such actors as E. A. Sothern, Joseph Jefferson, and other famous personalities; and by the musical and scenic extravaganzas which began to displace legitimate drama. This was in addition to the visits of such highly publicized actors as Edwin Booth, Tommaso Salvini, and Sarah Bernhardt. Therefore, the boy was able to see more great actors and to witness a wider variety of entertainment than ever before.

George's scrapbook is a testimony of his keen interest in theatre. Typical entries include clippings from Boston and Providence newspapers; reviews of Edwin Booth, and a magazine

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[5]George Pierce Baker, "Editorial," Register, (30 April 1883), I, 84.

account of the Wagner festival at Bayreuth, which includes a detailed description of Wagner's scenic effects.[6]

On October 18, 1881, George clipped from the Providence Journal a review of Ernesto Rossi in Othello. This performance in Providence came two weeks after Rossi's American debut in Boston. The boy had already clipped a Boston review of the same role and an article about the famous Italian's interpretations of Shakespeare.[7] George was reacting to the critical controversy raised by Rossi's style of acting. This was the question of naturalistic acting, a central issue in the theatre for many years to come. It was a question that had been argued in America between the followers of Forrest and Macready in the 1840's and 50's, of Forrest and Booth in the 1860's and 70's. Now, in George's time, the partisans aligned themselves with Ernesto Rossi or Tommaso Salvini.

Since Salvini's American debut in 1873, the admirers of Edwin Forrest's romantic style had found a model in the forceful rendition of Salvini's passionate and fiery Moor. Salvini's style was suddenly identified with that of Forrest. Therefore, when Rossi presented a low-keyed, understated, and more natural conception of Othello, there was heated debate. The Boston reviewers generally favored the naturalism of Rossi, but recognized the popular resistance to the new style.

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[6]Kinne, p. 11.

[7]"Rossi's Debut," Boston Daily Globe, 4 October 1881, p. 19; and "Rossi in Othello," Providence Journal, 18 October 1881, p. 8.

Although he followed the controversy with interest, George Pierce Baker was most familiar with the acting style of such men as William Warren, Edwin Booth, and the English tradition which dominated American taste in the theatre. Although his interest in Rossi's style was keen, he continued to admire the grace and elocution of actors like Booth and Bernhardt.

A look at Baker's high school days and his interest in the progress of actors like Ernesto Rossi, indicates that two important lines of his later thinking had perhaps begun to manifest themselves. First was the question of the relation of Shakespeare to the modern stage, and second, the relation of contemporary theatre to American life. The first led him through his scholarship in the history of English drama and his experiments in Elizabethan staging; the second brought him to the central problem of a native drama for America.

Baker entered Harvard as a student in 1883. In addition to the standard curriculum, he chose a course in elocution, his only academic acquaintance with drama his freshman year. However, he made frequent trips to Boston to attend theatre. On the sixteenth of November, 1883, he saw Edwin Booth in The Fool's Revenge, and a few days later in King Lear. He wrote in his diary,

> Nov. 21. Wednesday. . . During the afternoon I decided to see Booth as "King Lear," in the evening. I had to stand through the whole performance and my back feels as if it were broken. "Lear" surpasses as a whole, I think, Booth's Bertuccio, the fool. His rendering of the curse of Regan was

> magnificent. Again in the tempest scene as he lies down on the couch it is very touching. But in the mad scene, I think, he is most wonderful. He manages the bunch of straws which he holds in his hand in such a way that they almost tell the story. Now they are his kingdom which he had divided between his daughters, now his bow as he draws the arrow to its head, etc. . . The final heartbreak and death were fully up to the standard of the preceding act and filled out the rendition of "Lear" which I shall always remember and judge all others by. Throughout the tone was not as I am told Salvini's is, an awe-inspiring one, but sad, oh so sad.[8]

It is clear from this account that George was more interested in the acting than in what was acted, and in the whole emotional appeal of theatre than in the literary appeal of a particular play. Even at age seventeen, he did not think of drama as literature; it was a living, breathing experience to be shared between actor and audience.

> Saturday, April 19, 1884. . . After dinner went with Sandford, Campbell, and Kestner to see Jefferson as Rip Van Winkle. It was one of the finest things I have ever seen. So natural, tender, lifelike. His acting brought the tears to my eyes and equalled if it did not surpass Booth's recognition of Cordelia. Throughout the voice was hardly raised above the conversational tone and there was no ranting. A thoroughly delightful performance.[9]

Earlier in the year he had seen Henry Irving and Ellen Terry in The Merchant of Venice, done with all the scenic trappings for which Irving was famous, and an even more elaborate Much Ado About Nothing. His diary shows that he generally enjoyed the illusions created, but was critical

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[8]Diary, 21 November 1883. Baker kept a diary during his Freshman year at Harvard.

[9]Diary, 19 April 1884.

of Irving's acting, especially in those places where the illusion was not sustained.

> Wednesday, Feb. 27, 1884. . . In the evening went to hear Irving and Terry in "Much Ado About Nothing." It was charming. The whole company is good and the scenery very fine. The minutest particulars are well carried out. . . Terry took the honors. She was bewitching. . . Irving is fine in his way, but his mannerisms are trying: a halting gait, mouthing and mighty rolling of the eyes with a queer jerky gesture will not down but mar his acting.
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> Friday, February 29, 1884. . . a party was hastily arranged for Irving in the "Merchant of Venice" and I yielded foolishly and went. The scenery even surpassed that in "Much Ado About Nothing." The scene in front of Shylock's house with the bridge at the rear of the stage over the canal and the tall buildings in the distance, in the moonlight effect, was very fine. . . Irving was better. Still his Jew seemed too intellectual a rendering.[10]

Baker also criticized Irving's Malvolio, which he thought a "burlesque on human nature," and not "by any means the character Shakespeare wished to draw."[11]

Although infatuated with theatre, Baker did not seriously desire a career in it, except perhaps as a playwright. He hoped to become a writer, or possibly an editor. To him, the first great reward of his life came when elected editor-in-chief of the Harvard Monthly for 1886-87. During his editorship, Baker's personal literary contributions were few, but by the middle of October 1886, he had increased his list of subscribers from one hundred to five hundred. The magazine began to attract a more than local audience.

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[10]Diary, 27 and 29 February, 1884.

[11]Diary, 20 February 1884.

No longer an undergraduate affair, the Harvard Monthly became a literary magazine of New England.

As graduation approached, Baker remained unsure about his future. He met with Charles Scribner, Jr., in New York, who wanted someone to edit a magazine of literary criticism. A few days after his return to Cambridge, Baker received a message that he might have an instructorship at a western university. The offer promised a professorship in three or four years. However, Baker found the uncertain editorship more attractive. His decision, he wrote, was based on his unsuitableness for teaching. "The more I have thought of teaching, the more repugnant the idea has grown."[12] But in mid-August the blow came. Mr. Scribner had decided to make other arrangements. While in London the following year, Baker was appointed an instructor at Harvard for the upcoming academic year.

In 1888, George Pierce Baker, or G.P.B. as he was known among his colleagues, began the first of thirty-seven years of teaching at Harvard and Radcliffe. In 1890, he taught the first of the courses which became identified with his Harvard career: English 14, a study of English drama before the Puritan revolution. From this undergraduate course he developed his work in both the history and technique of the drama.

It is possible to estimate some of his early teaching from notes taken in the course by William Lyon Phelps, then

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[12]Kinne, p. 32.

beginning his graduate study in English literature. As W. P. Kinne states in his book on Baker, three traits of G.P.B.'s teaching appear quite clearly in Phelps' notes. These were his sympathetic understanding of the relation between the life and period and the plays of each dramatist; his belief that the dramas he taught were created for the stage and were to be acted rather than read; and his view that the history of drama showed an evolution of dramatic form.[13] In the maturity of his Harvard career, Baker's effectiveness with student actors and playwrights must have been determined to a large extent by these attitudes.

Baker read each play as a script for an actor, not a text for a reader, pointing out and stressing those things which could be appreciated only in terms of the stage. His eye caught the hints for stage business and blocking which are normally lost in the study of a play. His remark concerning Ben Jonson is characteristic. "Sometimes his plays act well when they don't read at all."[14] Commenting on Gammer Gurton's Needle he said, "The fun is, of course, very broad and full of filth: yet it. . . could be made very funny on stage."[15] In his lecture on John Heywood, who was "first of all an actor," Baker said, "In moments of extreme feeling,

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[13]Kinne, pp. 37-38.

[14]William Lyon Phelps, "The English Drama, Studied with Mr. Baker, 1890-91," 9 October 1890, Yale University Library.

[15]Ibid, 2 October 1890.

people don't make long speeches: they either say nothing or only a word. Heywood understood this perfectly."[16]

During his first year as a Harvard instructor, Baker organized an informal club to talk about the new movements in theatre. With G.P.B. as president, the group consisted of English and Philosophy colleagues as well as a few of Baker's senior forensic students. The subjects for discussion give an idea of what occupied Baker's mind during these years. The topics for 1888-89 included, "The Present Condition of English Drama," "Is a Naturalistic School of Acting Desirable?" and "Revivals of Shakespeare's Winter's Tale."[17]

In the decade from 1890 to 1900, Baker's life acquired the principal outlines of its maturity. During these years he taught, studied abroad, extended his attempts at writing, and continued his interest and participation in the drama. He established himself as a scholarly member of the Harvard faculty, principally through the publication of three important works, The Principles of Argumentation (1905), The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist (1907), and Dramatic Technique (1919). If Baker had never written anything else, his Principles of Argumentation would have brought him wide recognition. It was in no small way responsible for the growth of two collegiate phenomena of the early twentieth century, intercollegiate debating and Departments of Speech.

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[16]Ibid., 29 October 1890.

[17]Kinne, p. 36.

The book with which he had hoped to secure fame as a dramatic scholar was A Plot-Book of Some Elizabethan Plays, first announced in 1893. Although Baker was at work on the manuscript as late as 1913, the book was never published. As early as 1899, Baker's friend Barrett Wendell had suggested a way to secure his position as an authority on the drama. "You ought to give some Lowell lectures. . . on the stage conditions of the Elizabethan stage. . . . I doubt whether you realize the thoroughness of your present equipment."[18] Baker, who had long respected Wendell's judgment,[19] took his advice. Shakespeare's relationships, as a developing craftsman, with the taste of his Elizabethan public and the conditions of his particular stage had been on Baker's mind for some time, and he finally developed a course of Lowell lectures concerning these matters for the winter series of 1905-06. The year following their delivery, they were published as The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, a work which Wendell found dedicated to himself.

During a trip to Europe in 1901-02, Baker became acquainted with the staging practices of directors and theatre movements in several countries, among them was William Poel and the work of the Elizabethan Stage Society in England. Following this trip in 1903, Baker contacted the English actor Johnston Forbes Robertson inquiring about the possibility

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[18]Kinne, p. 45.

[19]Howe, Mark Antony DeWolfe, Barrett Wendell and His Letters (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1924), p. 42.

of his performing at Harvard. This exchange led to Baker's Elizabethan staging of Hamlet in Sanders Theatre in 1904.

The project with which George Pierce Baker is most commonly associated is the 47 Workshop. Shortly after the beginning of 1904, Baker planned his formal proposal of a new English course, "Instruction in Dramatic Composition." The proposal met with immediate opposition. However, when Baker explained that the course would be primarily for graduate students and that it offered professional training for which he could demonstrate a growing need, it was approved. In 1915, English 47a, an advanced course in the "Technique of the Drama" was added to the Harvard catalogue. Within ten years, Baker had achieved for his course in dramatic composition some of the requisites of a department within the Harvard English Department. Not the least of these was an annual catalogue of "Courses in the Drama" which appeared regularly after 1915, and which Baker prepared in order to bring to Harvard the more mature students who not only could be taught matters of technique but might also have something to say. Among those who studied under Professor Baker were Eugene O'Neill, Sidney Howard, Philip Barry, Robert Edmund Jones, Lee Simonson, and Alistair Cooke.

Without a theatre building, Baker spent much of his Harvard career setting up temporary arrangements for productions. He was often forced to stage scenework in classrooms and lecture halls. For many years, the 47 Workshop performed in little more than a laboratory classroom. In his Introduction

to the first series of Harvard Plays, Baker describes the makeshift situation.

> The small stage is really a lecture platform, originally surrounded by steel-girdered walls which have been slightly readjusted to make giving plays a little less difficult. Dressing rooms have been inadequate. Any painting of scenery must for lack of space be done away from the theatre. Because this was available for only two rehearsals before each performance, such work must for some years be done in a room the floor space of which bore no relation to the stage to be used. In other words, the 47 Workshop began much as any organization will begin which, having no special building, must give its plays in a hall on a stage primarily intended for lectures, must rehearse where it can, and must store its belongings here and there.[20]

It is little wonder that his attention turned first to staging Elizabethan drama. The simplicity and intimacy of its physical structure were the only means available to him at the time.

Baker spent the last few years of his Harvard career pleading for a theatre. He grew annoyed and increasingly disturbed that his genuine success with the workshop productions had not brought any official favor to his hopes for a new building. As his fifty-sixth birthday approached, he knew that such a favor would have to come soon. By 1924, his hopes and discussions had finally reached an impasse.

Meanwhile, talks between Baker and Edward Harkness concerning the establishment of a school of drama at Yale had been in progress. Baker was consulted concerning the cost and organization of such a venture, and when asked whether

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[20]George Pierce Baker, Harvard Plays, The 47 Workshop (New York: Brentanos, 1918), Introduction, p. ix.

he would take charge of the program, Baker remained cautious "I will take it under consideration."[21] The decision occupied him during the summer and fall of 1924, and on Wednesday, November 26, the official announcement came. G.P.B. had resigned. At the same time, Yale announced that the endowment by Harkness would provide for a Department of Drama and a University Theatre, both of which were to be directed by Professor Baker. Amid the ensuing commotion and excitement, which spawned all kinds of rumors, Heywood Broun very neatly summed up the situation: "Yale - 47, Harvard - 0."[22] Baker's own statement concerning his move was straightforward and quite characteristic.

> There has been a disposition to indicate that my relations at Harvard were unpleasant. This is utterly untrue. They were of the most pleasant and congenial sort. However, the University authorities could not see their way clear to extend the work. Yale offered the opportunity and I accepted it.[23]

However, he told personal friends candidly, "I could not go on any longer without a theatre."[24]

For the Yale Department of Drama's first year in existence, Baker surrounded himself with eminently qualified personnel. His staff included Hubert Osborne, assistant in directing; Evelyn Cohen, instructor in costuming; Stanley

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[21]Kinne, p. 246.

[22]Heywood Broun, "Professor George Pierce Baker," Collected Edition of Heywood Broun (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1941), pp. 115-118.

[23]Kinne, p. 248.

[24]Percival Reniers, "Behind the Scenes of the 47 Workshop," New York Times Magazine, 7 December 1924, p. 14.

McCandless, instructor in lighting; and Donald Oenslager, instructor in scenic design. All but Miss Cohen had been in the 47 Workshop.

On the tenth of December, 1926, the University Theatre itself opened, and Baker accepted a number of congratulations. Sir Johnston Forbes Robertson, Arthur Pinero, David Belasco, and Eugene O'Neill were among those who sent good wishes. From Paris, Granville-Barker cabled, "Good luck. Thanks largely to you, American Drama now takes rightful place among arts."[25]

The significance of George Pierce Baker's closing years at Yale rests not upon the realization of a university theatre, nor upon the professional quality of productions there. His basic philosophy was "the play's the thing." During a general theatrical prosperity that elevated the arts of the scenic designer and lighting specialist, Baker steadfastly maintained that the first artist of the theatre was the playwright. "The fundamental principle of The 47 Workshop - and to this it has held steadily throughout its history - has been that everyone from director to stage hands must cooperate in putting the play upon the stage as the author sees it."[26]

Following his retirement in 1933, Baker was still active in affairs of the theatre, and in December 1934 prepared another meeting of the National Theatre Conference, which

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[25]Kinne, p. 261.

[26]Baker, Harvard Plays, p. ix.

he had organized in 1927. He died on January 6, 1935. A New York Times editorial attempted to summarize his accomplishments.

> When Professor George Pierce Baker cordially agreed about thirty years ago to let some of his students submit plays instead of theses in fulfillment of the requirements of his English course at Harvard, no one foresaw the influence he would eventually have on the American theatre. There was nothing of the aggressive, self-conscious pioneer about him. . .
>
> With very little encouragement from Harvard which was officially disposed to regard "English 47" as his personal foible, he developed the course by intimate, fatherly association with his students. Many of them went actively to work in the professional theatre as soon as they graduated. Many others founded similar drama courses in other American universities. By the time Professor Baker moved to Yale in 1924, where the equipment seemed fabulous to him, he had fathered a great movement in college instruction and many of "Baker's dozens" were pitching into Broadway as playwrights, scene designers, directors and critics. . . . Although he took great pride in the progress his students made he stubbornly declined to regard them as his property.
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> It is, therefore, impossible to determine exactly the extent of his personal contribution to the professional theatre. But this much is certain; the meagerly equipped course at Harvard raised the prestige of the theatre enormously. In addition to the many students it sent directly into the theatre, it has, in one way or another, graduated a host of educated theatregoers.[27]

The career objectives of George Pierce Baker were diverse. Although he held an affection for Shakespeare and the Elizabethan period, his main objective was not the staging of revivals. Baker was involved in a number of theatre-related activities. He was a teacher and administrator

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[27]"G. P.," New York Times editorial, 8 January 1935, p. 20.

as well as director, and his influence upon young theatre artists is well known. It might be said that his objective was the education and development of native playwrights for the American theatre, and yet a sampling of his students reveals a wide range of theatre practitioners, such as Robert Edmund Jones, Stanley McCandless, and Lee Simonson, as well as dramatists like O'Neill and Sidney Howard. There is one overall objective, however, which Baker pursued throughout his career, one which he finally achieved: the establishment of a theatre curriculum within the university. Baker's Elizabethan staging, therefore, was an integral part of that objective, for it demonstrated the practical results of such a program. Baker believed that the staging of Elizabethan drama "provides something of a literary laboratory for testing certain ideas about the Elizabethan public theatre."[28]

William Poel

On July 22, 1852, in the city of Westminster, England, a son named William was born to William Pole, Sr., and his wife, Matilda. The Poles had resided west of London for several generations and traced a descent from Cardinal Reginald Pole, counselor to Mary Tudor. Recently some of them had moved to London. William arrived as the fourth child of his parents; they already had two sons and a daughter. William Pole, senior, who had a talent for both

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[28]Kinne, p. 60.

music and mathematics, worked as a civil engineer. From 1844 until 1847 he taught engineering at Elphinstone College, Bombay, and at the time of William's birth, worked in the construction of railways. From 1859 to 1867 he served as Professor of Civil Engineering at University College, London, and from 1878 to 1891 examiner for musical degrees at London University. He experienced a versatile, distinguished, and characteristically Victorian career.

Mrs. Pole was the daughter of the Reverend Henry Gauntlett, Vicar of Olney and author of a commentary on the Bible. Her brother, Henry John, gained fame as an organist. He patented a new electrical organ and authored the Encyclopedia of the Chant, published in 1885. From both sides of his family, the young William Poel[29] inherited a fine artistic sense, an intellectual seriousness, and a delicate ear for music. His father was logical, industrious, and determined to the point of obstinacy; his mother was a delicate woman, but intensely religious with a strong, orthodox faith.

William Poel was acquainted from his earliest years with all that was most high-minded in mid-Victorian culture. His young features caught the eye of the artist Holman Hunt, who was a frequent visitor to the Pole family, and who chose him as a model for his work, "The Discovery of Christ in the Temple." This painting now hangs in the Birmingham Art Gallery

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[29]Poel changed the spelling of his name while on tour with Charles Mathews' company in 1876. He often used the correct spelling later in life on occasions unconnected with theatre.

in England. He was also singled out by Sir Frederick Burton to serve as model for "The Knight's Esquire." a watercolor now housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. In spite of his early introduction to the artist's world, it was music which played the largest part of his young life. He was taught to play the cello which, according to Robert Speaight, he mastered to a certain degree, "though not always to his father's satisfaction."[30]

There is little information about Poel's schooling, except that his frail health contributed to frequent absences. At the age of twelve he fell onto a railway line, which affected his health for years to come. It imposed on him a large measure of solitude. At the age of fourteen he was described as "dreamy and restless."[31] He was later judged too delicate to be sent to the university, where his brothers had gone before him, and was apprenticed instead to building contractors at age seventeen.

It is impossible to say at what point William Poel decided to pursue theatre as a career. He did not go to the theatre until he was twenty years old, when his father took him to see The Merchant of Venice. In fact, he had little opportunity for theatre-going, for he left London soon after entering his apprenticeship and worked in Warnham, a small

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[30]Robert Speaight, William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 16. I am indebted to Speaight's work for much of the content of this section.

[31]Letter from G. B. Stuart to Mrs. Pole, 10 January 1935, cited in Speaight, p. 17.

village near Horsham, in Sussex. He wrote in his diary,

> Shut up in that little village there were no classes to be attended, no libraries, no reading-rooms, no people, no competition, no excitement, no variety. I love being alone. I am always happy then, but I mean inwardly, not outwardly.[32]

He returned to London at Christmas 1873 and was able to compare the advantages of this inward solitude in a town as opposed to the country.

> Now when I am alone in London, my loneliness consists of my feeling myself to be a very small object in an extraordinary large circulation of activity where my eyes can for ever feast on what is well suited for the digestion of my mind. Whether I am walking in the streets, or sitting in a theatre or office there is always before me a panorama for ever moving of human life - and yet never the same, for the scenes are a mixture and revelation of the sublime and the ridiculous. So my mind no longer hungers.[33]

In the spring of 1874, when he was twenty-two, he saw Philip by Henry Taylor and The Bells by Lewis Erckmann-Chatrian at the Lyceum, and we get his first opinions on the art of Henry Irving. Poel's views on acting and production were not yet formulated, however, he did not think Philip a very good play. It seemed to him "too much of a comedy to suit Henry Irving. His acting towards the end of the first act is, no doubt, well finished; but considered throughout it seems to me too forced in some parts and I

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[32]Poel kept a diary between 1 February 1874 and 6 August 1878, cited in Speaight, p. 18.

[33]Speaight, p. 18.

should be inclined to call him pedantic, carrying on his psychological movements to a needless extent."[34] The Bells he found dissatisfying in its blatant sensationalism, although he was charmed by the first two acts, and thought "the climax at the second act when Mathias jumps up from his chair and frantically joins the dance. . . the finest conceived and best rendered piece of acting"[35] he had ever seen. But the third act disgusted him; he found it false to art and to good sense.[36] Even in his early twenties, Poel was opposed to the seductions of illusionism, as he was an exaggerated rhetorical style. It was not Irving but Charles Mathews who really excited his enthusiasm. He went to see him in Sheridan's The Critic and wrote afterwards,

> Charles Mathews is the man to see for acting. I never saw anything like it before in anybody else. His short, quick way of speaking, giving his own particular emphasis to every little sentence. His brisk movements, so natural and graceful. While you are hearing him, you seem to forget you are in a theatre, and during the representation of The Critic, you imagine yourself to be watching some persons amusing themselves with a rehearsal, not acting a studied play, and you felt inclined to jump on to the stage and join in the fun.[37]

It is interesting to know that Charles Mathews had also been the idol of Henry Irving. Poel also saw Mathews as Charles Surface in The School for Scandal, surrounded by a brilliant cast, assembled for the benefit of Benjamin Webster

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[34]Diary, 24 May 1874, cited in Speaight, p. 20.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Speaight, pp. 20-21.

on his retirement from the management of the Adelphi. But what impressed him even more than Mathews were the visits of French companies to the Princess Theatre in the spring and summer of 1874. These performances gave Poel a permanent standard of acting values. What he liked particularly about the French method was its willing obedience to rhythm. English acting, by comparison, seemed stilted and staccato. Poel's taste was classical; he had no appreciation for the indulgences of romantic sensationalism.

> A powerful actor can move his audience to tears at a striking incident towards the middle or close of the play, because he has been careful from the commencement of the play to represent the feelings as affected by the various minor incidents leading up to the great one. Thus a corresponding feeling has been awakened in us and we sympathise with the character represented. But if the same actor was to come forward and give us a striking incident without the previous preparation, we should laugh and not cry. It is so in life. We cannot sympathise with the sudden outbursts of another person's feelings, because we do not know or have not seen their origin.[38]

This is mature criticism for a man of twenty-two. The strength of Poel's convictions supplied him with an increasing courage. In December 1874, he sat through Hamlet at Drury Lane, and started questioning the popular acting style in London.

> When individuals walk about the stage with measured steps, stand in symmetrical positions, raising their hands first to their breasts, then towards the heavens, then towards the earth, making recitals of every speech they utter, I feel sure it is fatal to all interpretation of character. I am glad a revolution has come to pass. A good actor will now, I

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[38]Speaight, p. 24.

> believe, make it his business to abstain as much as possible from this sort of business. . . A man, when he tells his friends he hopes to go to heaven, does not point towards the sky to demonstrate his meaning. Why, then, should it be done on the stage?[39]

Another actor who had a profound influence upon Poel was the Italian Tommaso Salvini. "No one then knew," he later wrote after Salvini's death, "with what awe I approached the shrine where Salvini stood in the likeness of a superhuman. . . . It was the genius of the poet-dramatist Shakespeare, and of the actor Salvini who so finely interpreted some of his characters, which urged me to labour in the cause of the theatre."[40] He commented on the great actor's Hamlet.

> To me Salvini's Hamlet had a charm as great as, if not greater than his Othello. He acted Hamlet as I never saw it done before, and probably never shall again. There was a prince in manner as well as birth; and the fact of the part having been studied, not from the play as known through its acting edition but from the original text, rendered the interpretation free from many inconsistencies that displace the Shakespearean student. . . . He was content with natural gestures, a variety of delicate intonations, and very graceful and expressive movements, for his interpretation of the character. . . . May this be my justification for urging all coming Hamlets to banish from their minds not only our present acting edition of the play, but also the traditional business connected with it, and to found their conception of this complex character on a careful study of the text alone.[41]

What Poel had admired in Salvini was the testing of every effect by reference to the text. Here in 1874 was his message

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[39]Diary, 18 December 1874, in Speaight, p. 25.

[40]Speaight, p. 26.

[41]Ibid., pp. 26-27.

of a new return to the original. It was certainly not yet formulated in his mind when he saw Salvini as Othello in April 1875. Yet by realizing the essentials of Salvini's approach to acting and the consummate ease of his technique, Poel came to see more clearly what was wrong with the theatre around him. Poel once claimed that he walked on as a super in one of Salvini's productions;[42] it is possible that he did so in the spring of 1875.

Although Poel followed with great interest the careers of actors such as Mathews and Salvini, there is no evidence that he had any serious ambition to pursue an acting career. It seems that his approach to theatre was at first critical rather than creative. He wanted to find out what the theatre was really like; he wanted to study Shakespeare and to discover all he could about the art of acting. Therefore, he began to audition as an actor, and for two and a half years, toured the provinces.

In February 1876, Poel went to Bristol to audition for Charles Mathews, who was then starting a tour of the provinces. Poel joined the company, and by a printing mistake in the program, Pole became Poel. He may have kept this name change in order to spare his father, who had strongly opposed his going on the stage.[43] When he left Mathews he became a general utility man at a theatre in Dublin and afterwards in Liverpool. About this time Poel saw Irving as Richard III

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[42]Speaight, p. 28.

[43]Ibid., p. 30.

at the Lyceum and reviewed the performance in his diary.

> He has a true artistic mind, a great love for completeness in details of scenery and costume, and correctness in the small parts. In his own acting he is most successful in the comedy element and seems to me unable to rise to greatness in a pathetic or passionate situation. He appears to aim at creating an effect by working his scene up to a striking picture upon which the curtain may fall. This is a modern practice that I much dislike as it is sensational and stagey.[44]

Poel joined Clifford Cooper's company at the Theatre Royal, Oxford for the summer, 1877 and in October obtained an engagement with James Scott's company at Rosedale in the North Riding of Yorkshire. He remained with Scott for nine months. In June 1878, Poel decided to take acting lessons. His critical faculties were now directed upon himself, and it's possible that he began to doubt whether he had the talent to justify his perseverance. His training as an actor would now be mainly useful to him in his direction of others. Poel was becoming more and more, the critic and reformer. He saw Irving again in 1878 and found him "more mannered and faulty than ever."[45] In answer to the question, "What do you think of Irving?" Poel later replied, "I wouldn't give him five pounds a week," and then added, "He is wonderful in his way, but it is not my way."[46]

In the winter of 1878, Poel went on tour in the provinces, finding audiences where he could, and giving recitals from

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[44]Diary, 23 February 1877, in Speaight, p. 32.

[45]Speaight, p. 42.

[46]Ibid.

Shakespeare, Sheridan, and other classical playwrights. In June 1879, he formed "The Elizabethans," a company of professional ladies and gentlemen whose efforts are specially directed towards creating a more general taste for the study of Shakespeare,"[47] which toured the country giving costumed recitals from Shakespeare. The extremely simple conditions of these performances threw the actors back upon the text, and Poel was forced to compare the acting editions of Shakespeare then in use[48] with the original versions of the plays. He realized how much the texts had been altered since leaving the stage manager of the Globe or Blackfriars Theatre.

In October 1880, Poel wrote to Dr. F. J. Furnivall, President of the New Shakespeare Society, and offered to deliver a paper on the acting editions of Shakespeare. Only twenty-eight years old, he was a relatively unknown actor and scholar. However, Furnivall accepted Poel's offer and the paper was given the following June. At the time he proposed it, Poel could hardly have realized how fortunate a moment he had chosen. Only a few months earlier William Griggs had published his facsimile editions of the first and second Quartos of Hamlet (1603 and 1604 respectively) with a foreward by Furnivall himself. The time was indeed at hand for the Elizabethan revival. Poel was so stirred by his study of the new editions that he wrote another letter

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[47] Speaight, p. 46.

[48] See pp. 43-46.

to Furnivall on February 1, 1881.

> I need hardly say how delighted I was to be able to read these first two editions of the play. If to the literary student the Quarto of 1604 has the chief interest, I feel sure that to an actor the Quarto of 1603 has an equal interest, because however misrepresented the text may be, the actor cannot help recognizing that the Editor has endeavored to reproduce the play as he saw it represented and therefore in the arrangement of the scenes, the stage directions, the omissions, and the alterations, there is much to guide and instruct him in the stage representation of the play as it appeared in Shakespeare's time. . . . I could not help thinking. . . a performance of the Quarto might be of some interest to students . . . . My idea would be to have it played by amateurs so as to avoid much expense, and if it was thought the performance would excite any interest to make it a public one.[49]

Furnivall accepted Poel's suggestion. On the afternoon of April 16, 1881 an Elizabethan Hamlet was staged on a bare, draped platform at St. George's Hall. This was an historic date in the annals of English Theatre, but it was at the same time obscure and unheralded. Therefore, the performance had little immediate effect.

The following years must have sorely tried the patience of this brave reformer. Poel set out first to elaborate and define his ideas by comparing his interpretation of a Shakespearean performance with those he saw around him. He was continually dismayed by popular productions such as those at London's Lyceum. In 1884, however, he saw Hamlet at the Princess Theatre, and felt it was a better acting version than had hitherto been given. Many of the suggestions Poel

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[49]Speaight, p. 48.

had made in his lecture to the New Shakespeare Society had also been adopted.[50]

In October 1881, Poel was appointed manager of the Royal Victoria Coffee Hall, later known as the "Old Vic," which had opened the previous December. Poel held this appointment until Christmas 1883. During these two years he reduced the expense of management and attracted large audiences to the Hall.

After leaving the Royal Victoria, Poel worked for six months as stage manager with F. R. Benson. Poel found much to admire in this new company, for Benson was not only a remarkable actor, he was also a born leader who surrounded himself with talented performers. Poel had never worked with actors as good as the Benson company, and his job as stage manager proved an important step in his development as a director.

Whenever Elizabethan reform was discussed, Poel was anxious to speak. He participated regularly in discussions of the New Shakespeare Society. He wrote newspaper articles and editorials, and began to lecture extensively. Nothing seemed to escape his criticism or comment. Gradually, his views became known. In 1887 Poel took his next step toward reform. He was invited to become instructor for the Shakespeare Reading Society, and in the recitals and productions he directed for them, he adopted many of the principles he illustrated in productions throughout his career. The

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[50]Ibid., p. 58.

Reading Society had been founded by students of University College, London with Henry Irving as president. At first the actors sat and read the plays without act or scene divisions, and with a minimum of cuts. Although unnoticed at first, these simple recitals began to attract the attention of a London journalist named George Bernard Shaw.

> If we watch the amateur performances of Elizabethan drama with which Mr. Poel does such good work, we find that those performers who are members of the Shakespeare Reading Society,. . . acquit themselves much better, in point of delivery, than average professional actors.[51]

Poel is most often associated with the establishment of the Elizabethan Stage Society in 1894. The Stage Society, whose long list of performances gives Poel his title to fame, was born quite naturally out of the costume recitals he organized for the Shakespeare Reading Society. From 1895 until 1905, the Elizabethan Stage Society was responsible for mounting thirty-two Elizabethan productions, twelve of which were Shakespearean. When asked why the Stage Society was founded, Poel replied,

> It was just for acting's sake that the Elizabethan Stage Society was born. Some people have called me an archaeologist, but I am not. I am really a modernist. My original aim was just to find out some means of acting Shakespeare naturally and appealingly from the full text as in a modern drama. I found that for this the platform stage was necessary and also some suggestion of the spirit and manners of the time.[52]

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[51]George Bernard Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1932), III, p. 329.

[52]Speaight, p. 90.

Poel continued to produce and direct Elizabethan plays the rest of his life. He lectured often and acted occasionally. He played the part of Keegan, the poet-visionary, in Shaw's John Bull's Other Island on more than one occasion. He wrote and directed several of his own plays, such as The First Franciscans and The Temptation of Agnes. In the years immediately preceding and following the first World War, Poel travelled in Germany, Austria, Holland, and France to observe theatre. Poel's lectures, newspaper articles, and papers from various periodicals were published in two volumes, Shakespeare in the Theatre (1913), and Monthly Letters (1929).

In the spring of 1916, Poel received an invitation from Thomas Wood Stevens of the Drama Department at Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh. He was invited to visit the Institute that summer and work with students. He arrived in June and stayed for three weeks. He rehearsed scenes from Macbeth and Hamlet, and directed a public reading of Life's a Dream by Calderon de la Barca. On June 8, he gave the commencement address at the Institute; his topic was Shakespeare. Poel reminded his audience that Shakespeare was primarily a workman. He stated that Shakespeare's message to students today would be this:

> You cannot show any respect for me unless you show respect for the work I have done. To say that you admire my plays and then to put them on the bookshelf and content yourselves with writing commentaries upon them may satisfy the ambitions of the critics, but it is no compliment to me. If you

> care for my plays please show it by talking and writing a little less about them, and having them acted a little oftener.[53]

Poel was invited to return in October 1916 and stage any play of his choosing. He returned with the costumes for Jonson's The Poetaster, and produced the play for three performances. They were a notable success and were repeated at the University of Detroit. He gave lectures in Chicago and California before returning to England. His effect on American opinion at the time was described by Stephen Allard for Theatre Arts Magazine.

> William Poel's conception of an Elizabethan theatre performance differs radically from that of certain dry-brained professors who have made "Elizabethan revival" a byword at the colleges. Instead of trying to reconstruct the outward semblance, the archaeological detail, he set himself the task of finding what it was in the Elizabethan drama that could hold a crowd of "groundlings" absorbed for two solid hours. He had long ago mastered the scholarly side of the subject, and he knew that mere fidelity to detail would not hold either a seventeenth-century or a twentieth-century audience. He sought the solution in the manner of performance, in the spirit with which the director "put over" the play. . . . In William Poel's revival of (The) Poetaster, there is a real contribution to the history of theatre art; and many a student in the audience has begun to see the whole Elizabethan drama in a new light. . . And William Poel playing upon the voices of American students wrought a miracle. . . . Those who have worried much over the horrors of the American's acting voice, found in the production relief from their pessimism over the future of American acting. If William Poel can do so much with raw material in a few weeks, there is still hope for some of the professionals.[54]

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[53]William Poel, Monthly Letters (London: T. Werner Laurie, Ltd., 1929), p. 59.

[54]Stephen Allard, "William Poel in America," Theatre Arts Magazine, 16 November 1916, pp. 24-26.

In 1927 at the age of seventy-five, he reorganized the Elizabethan Stage Society as the Elizabethan Stage Circle and produced several platform-staged dramas. This was the first time Poel was able to test his theories on a full Elizabethan platform outside the confines of a proscenium arch.[55] Among the plays produced were Rowley's When You See Me, You Know Me, Jonson's Sejanus, and Shakespeare's Coriolanus. His last production was George Peele's David and Bethsabe on November 29, 1932. In the winter 1933, Poel had two minor accidents which confined him to his bed during the last year of his life. However, in November 1934, he travelled to the New Theatre to witness John Gielgud's Hamlet. This was his last visit to a theatre. He died December 13, 1934 at the age of eighty-two. The English poet John Drinkwater wrote of him:

> Many have made the Elizabethan Muse
> Memorable in our time, when such remote
> And unconsidered memories are news
> In the day's violence of little note;
> They have told us yet that in our active age
> Of speed and millioned fortune, we have still
> Something to learn from that old pilgrimage
> When verse took audit of the timeless will.
>
> And of these gospellers, none stood as he
> So fearless in the scrutiny of time,
> Who held all knowledge of our state to be
> The revelation of a Tudor rhyme;
> He lies forgotten ere his ash is cold
> By them who swell the thunder of a day;
> Yet, when the reckoning of our stage is told,
> How shall he shine more prudently than they.[56]

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[55] Speaight, p. 245.

[56] John Drinkwater, The Collected Poems of John Drinkwater, 1923-1937 (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1937), III, p. 264.

Poel's activities touched a great many lives and influenced more than one generation of theatre practitioners. Among those who worked directly with Poel were Harley Granville-Barker, Robert Atkins, Nugent Monck, Edith Evans, Sybil Thorndike, Esme Percy, Lewis Casson, and Donald Wolfit.[57] As Allardyce Nicoll states, "William Poel was a maker of actors,"[58] and the impact of his systematic training is evident even today.

William Poel never tried to be fashionable, and contrary to popular opinion, he did not possess old-fashioned or erratic ideas. What he possessed was the gift of prophecy. William Archer maintained that the reform which Poel advocated would in any case have been adopted; that by the end of the nineteenth century it was already in the air. The fact remains, however, that in the matter of Shakespearean interpretation in the theatre, Poel was a pioneer. Lonely and courageous, he died with no other reward than the satisfaction of an artistic conscience. If Poel had lived another twenty years, however, he would have seen to what extent the theatre had caught up with him. As Shaw stated, "William Poel gave us an artistic rather than a literal presentation of Elizabethan conditions, the result being, as always happens in such cases, that the picture of the past was really a picture of the future."[59]

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[57]Norman Marshall, The Producer and the Play (London: Macdonald, 1957), p. 151.

[58]Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama, 1660-1900 (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), V, p. 775.

[59]Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties, II, p. 185.

Throughout his life, Poel's foremost objective was the production of Elizabethan revivals. He devoted his life to staging plays in the manner of the Elizabethans. This is not to deny other accomplishments during his career, and it is indeed ironic that his greatest success, financially at least, was a revival of the Medieval Everyman. However, Poel always returned to the Elizabethans, and emphasized the public's appreciation of an Elizabethan performance. Poel believed that, "By stimulating actors to study their parts from an artistic point of view, and less from a theatrical one, it would enable the public to appreciate Shakespeare in the only place where he can be properly understood, and that is the theatre."[60]

In order to understand more clearly the contributions of Baker and Poel to the reform of Elizabethan staging, it is helpful to review those staging practices which were current both in England and America during the nineteenth century. An understanding of the popular traditions in staging Shakespeare provide a background for the pioneer work done by Baker and Poel. The majority of Shakespearean production in the nineteenth century followed an illusionistic tradition, although there were several attempts throughout the century to supply non-illusory staging for Shakespeare's plays.

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[60]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 176

Chapter II

REPRESENTATIVE ELIZABETHAN STAGING IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Illusionistic Tradition

Audiences of the twentieth century, who are accustomed to seeing bare, one-unit sets against non-representational backgrounds may find it hard to understand the satisfaction with which our predecessors viewed the spectacular illusion of the Kembles and the Keans, while at the same time accepting a declamatory style of acting. Perhaps even more confusing were the mutilations of the text. Although Shakespeare was regularly performed during the nineteenth century, it had become commonplace to rewrite his plays. It is true, however, that mid-Victorians were actually hearing more of Shakespeare's words. The insistent criticism of men of letters like Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt had taken effect, and there was a gradual but steady return to Shakespeare's text. However, in spite of the new bardolotry at the end of the eighteenth century, throughout the nineteenth, the hacking, plastering and decorating of Shakespeare for the stage was still normal practice.

Shakespearean production in the nineteenth century was dominated by a drive toward pictorial illusion, and under the influence of such actor-managers as John Philip Kemble,

William Charles Macready, Charles Kean, and Henry Irving, the English stage continued to reach new heights of spectacle. The American theatre emulated those practices current in England, and the work of men such as Edwin Booth and Augustin Daly set the standard for staging Shakespeare. The following are some of the actor-managers, both in England and America, who maintained the illusionistic tradition of Elizabethan staging.

The London stage at the beginning of the nineteenth century was dominated by John Philip Kemble, and remained so until his retirement in 1817. He used Colley Cibber's version of Richard III unquestioningly. In 1700, Cibber had pasted together lines from five of the history plays, and according to George Odell in his book, Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving, this version was better than Shakespeare's. "It is nervous, unified, compact, where the original is sprawling, diffuse, and aimless."[1] He goes on to say that "whatever we may think of that master-craftsman's hatchet work and carpentry on several of the historical pieces, the fact remains that his Richard III was a magnificent bit of theatrical effectiveness; all who have given it up in favour of the original, have regretted their choice."[2] Shakespeare's Richard returned with Samuel Phelps in 1845. Kemble also used an earlier version of Lear by Nahum Tate, introducing his own mutilations

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[1]George C. D. Odell, Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), II, p. 153.

[2]Ibid., p. 55.

by omitting the blinding of Gloucester and his fall from Dover Cliff. London had to wait for Macready's revival of King Lear in 1838 to get some sense of the original story, although the Gloucester scenes were still omitted.[3] At this time there was apparently little feeling in the theatre for Shakespeare's structural rhythms and ordering of emphasis. Kemble's Tempest still included Dryden's gay Restoration couple Dorinda and Hippolyto, and since Dorinda outshone Miranda as a pert innocent, her part was usually played by the better actress to show off her legs. Such was the interest in Shakespeare's mature comedy in 1806. It is perhaps easy to ridicule this sort of patchwork, but it must be realized that Kemble had first to ensure the paying presence of an audience. As Odell points out,

> This version (of The Tempest), when finally perfected by Kemble, had a steadier and a longer stage life than Shakespeare's own work has ever enjoyed. Perhaps we should remember that in judging a man who strives to attract audiences. Without some such tempering mercy, we shall hardly know how to deal with a manager whose King Lear is Tate's, whose Richard III is Cibber's, whose Comedy of Errors is Hull's, who uses Garrick's Romeo and Juliet, and goes out of his way to engraft on Coriolanus large bits of Thomson, and on The Tempest large masses of Dryden and Davenant.[4]

However, by the middle of the century, the judicious additions of the eighteenth century had vanished. Gone were William Davenant's jolly songs and dances for Macbeth, with the stage filled with a host of witches singing and dancing.

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[3]Odell, II, pp. 195-197.

[4]Ibid., p. 60.

Phelps restored Macbeth in 1847. Pyramus and Thisbe no longer appeared in As You Like It, nor Beatrice and Benedick in Measure for Measure. Colley Cibber no longer shared the honor of being co-author with Shakespeare of Richard III.[5]

Other problems arose, however, which were not as easily solved. After the fires of 1808 and 1809, Covent Garden and Drury Lane had been rebuilt as lavish and cavernous temples. The new Drury Lane had a proscenium opening of 33 feet; Covent Garden extended to 42 feet 6 inches with wings of 20 feet. Three hundred lamps lit the stage. Covent Garden seated 3,044 persons, and Drury Lane 3,611.[6] The theatres were spectacles themselves. The immense size of these playhouses should be held in mind when we judge a Victorian actor-manager's failure to capture Shakespeare's intention behind a scene of domestic intimacy, or the rapport between an Elizabethan clown and his audience, and the pace of the actors' repartee. Both great patent theatres forced actors to bellow if Shakespeare's words were to be heard at all. Gestures had to be exaggerated in order to be seen by every audience member. Certainly there could have been no thought of approximating the working conditions of an Elizabethan playwright and his actors.

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[5]J. L. Styan, The Shakespeare Revolution: Criticism and Performance in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: University Press, 1977), p. 12.

[6]James Boaden, Life of Kemble (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), II, pp. 487-495.

Another powerful force at this time began to overwhelm Shakespeare on the stage and to diminish the importance of the actors. The mid-century theatres became magic boxes, and audiences were enthralled by the new art of scenic machinery.

To compete with technical displays, Kemble resorted to authenticity in the Roman and history plays, and increased the splendor of his costumes and sets. He decorated the stage with marble architecture, painted palaces, and imposing cathedrals and streets. Richard III had the Tower of London itself on stage. The new Shakespearean spectacle arrived at Covent Garden in the season of 1811-12 with Kemble's Henry VIII. The Times provided an awestruck description of the lavish display without which, the correspondent believed, the audience could not sustain the play's "accumulated ennui."

> The decorations were profuse, and the whole mechanical preparation of the most superb order. . . . In its five acts it has, as distinctly as we can remember, three processions, two trials before the king, a banquet, and a royal christening. The banquet deserved all the praise that can be given to costly elegance. It was the most dazzling stage exhibition that we have ever seen. The tables were continued round the stage, covered with golden ornaments, and the whole pomp of princely feasting. As the scene receded, it was filled with attendants and guards in their glittering coats of livery. The Gothic pillars, the rich tracery of the architecture, the various and shifting splendor that fell from the chandeliers, the glittering company of courtly dames and barons bold, gave as many images to the eye and mind, as perhaps could be given by the highest combination of theatric ornament and theatric taste.[7]

This indulgence served as a challenge to subsequent actor-managers, and panoramic forum scenes appeared in Julius Caesar,

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[7] Times (London), 21 October 1811, p. 3.

an overwhelming storm in The Tempest, magnificent sea-fights in Antony and Cleopatra, and an unending procession to match the glories of the coronation in Henry IV, Part II.

Playbills began to announce the names of armies of decorators. In his A Midsummer Night's Dream of 1816, Frederick Reynolds graced Theseus' palace with a grand Doric colonnade. Oberon and Titania made their entrance riding in cars with their fairy trains in procession; from time to time clouds descended and opened to discover singing fairies.[8] Confirming the impression that spectators rated a play by its ostentation, Macready in 1841 instituted the practice of distributing descriptive lists of scenes on handbills, adding historical notes where necessary. "The general feeling at this time was that Shakespeare wrote magnificent poetry, but not good plays."[9] Actor-managers produced memorable illustrations of Shakespeare with historical references. Historiography itself became fashionable after Kemble's younger brother, Charles, mounted a production of King John which set new standards for scenic scholarship.

After 1817 the new world of gaslight emerged and twenty years later, limelight. Macready first recognized its potentials for the stage, but after using it for a time in 1837 he gave it up as too expensive. Nevertheless, by the 1850's it was adopted widely and played a prominent role in the productions of Samuel Phelps and Charles Kean. These new methods in

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[8]Styan, p. 17.

[9]Ibid.

lighting provided a new incentive for painters, carpenters, costume designers, and machinists. It now became possible to supply a moonlit garden for The Merchant of Venice and a moonlit wood for A Midsummer Night's Dream. The mellow and brilliant rays of limelight were first used to create such atmospheric effects as sunlight or moonlight, but gradually its potential for lighting the acting area developed. Eventually it came to be used primarily as a follow spot to emphasize starring performers. When electricity arrived in the time of Irving and Beerbohm Tree, enthusiasm for illusion and lighting effects knew no bounds. Tree's version of Dream in 1900 had luminous pillars. By 1911, the pillars were brighter still, and the garlands were strings of electric lights; even the magic western flower, "love-in-idleness," had a small internal light.[10]

Technical advancements led to increasingly realistic special effects. In 1820, Edmund Kean contrived so violent a storm for his King Lear that the effects of trees bending and wind roaring stole applause from the actor, who could not be heard above the din. One critic remarked, "He should have recollected that it is the bending of Lear's mind under his wrongs that is the object of interest, and not that of a forest beneath the hurricane."[11] Macready mounted a spectacularly beautiful Tempest in 1838, but even then critics began to

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[10]William Winter, Shakespeare on the Stage (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co., 1911), III, pp. 259-260.

[11]Styan, p. 18.

argue that scenic resources could aid the dramatic illusion provided they are subservant to the higher purposes of the scene.

From 1837 to 1839, William Macready managed Covent Garden and from 1841 to 1843 Drury Lane, each with more artistic than financial success. In spite of difficulties, however, Macready introduced many innovations which became standard procedure. As manager, Macready paid attention to every detail of his productions. He was the first director who consistently sought historical accuracy in both costumes and scenery, and employed the finest landscape artists and designers of his day. In 1838, Macready's Henry V went so far as to illustrate the words of the Chorus with pictorial illustrations by Clarkson Stanfield,[12] and amazed its audience with a machine to provide a moving diorama of the siege of Harfleur in which the pictorial melted into the play's action. It is interesting to note that the critic from The Times, though impressed with the spectacle, stated that "Excessive pageantry is no sign of a revival of the drama. . . . However great the attempt to represent closely an army on a battlefield, still the obviousness of the attempt can only render its fruitlessness more apparent. . . . The discrepancy between the stage and reality still remains."[13] Commenting on Madame Vestris's A Midsummer Night's Dream of 1840, a reviewer stated that "an occasional preference of the suggestive to the actual would be more in

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[12]Styan, p. 18.

[13]Ibid., p. 19

keeping with the fairy texture of the drama and would take greater hold of the fancy."[14]

Macready's innovations included several restorations of the Shakespearean text. In 1838 he eliminated Nahum Tate's love affair between Cordelia and Edgar, and recovered the Fool in King Lear. However, he lacked confidence that the Fool could ever be played by a man and settled for a woman in the part. It was not until Samuel Phelps' version at Sadlers Wells in 1845 that a male actor once again assumed the role.[15] However, there was more of Shakespeare in Macready's production than at any time since Burbage,[16] but speeches were still cut and rearranged to give Lear, played by Macready, stronger exits. Thus began the practice of running scenes out of order, to ease the burden on the already over-burdened scene-changers. The following describes such a curious medley of scenes from Macready's text.

> In Act II, Scene 4, after the entrance of Lear in Gloster's castle, and before he sees Kent in the stocks, is interpolated the fifth scene of Shakespeare's Act I, the scene between the Fool and Lear. The act ends with Lear's rushing off into the storm, "O fool, I shall go mad!" The third act restores, at the beginning, the scene between Kent and the Gentleman, bringing the ravings of Lear on the heath into the second scene. In the act there is a curious union of the two mad scenes of the King. The fourth scene begins with Shakespeare's fourth, part of the heath, with a hovel, into which is injected, much curtailed, Shakespeare's Scene 6, the farmhouse, with the entry of Gloster,

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[14]Styan, p. 19.

[15]Ibid., p. 240.

[16]Ibid., p. 19

> Lear's imagined trial of Goneril, etc., and then ends with the last part of the original Scene 4.[17]

Following the example set by Edmund Kean in 1820, Macready was one of the first major stars to play extensively in America, making tours in 1826-27, 1843-45, and 1849.

After the Act of 1843 repealed the monopoly of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, legitimate Shakespeare could be played anywhere. Covent Garden became an opera house in 1847 and Drury Lane sank temporarily under a popular load of opera and circus, but Samuel Phelps at Sadler's Wells and Charles Kean at the Princess supplied new homes for Shakespeare. Phelps' purist approach to the text could not be sustained in 1849 for Antony and Cleopatra, in which forty-two scene-changes prompted every kind of scene juggling. But in 1856, Phelps' production of Timon of Athens was noteworthy for reasons other than the attraction of spectacle.

> A main cause of the success of Mr. Phelps in his Shakespearean revivals is, that he shows in his author above all things the poet. Shakespeare's plays are always poems, as performed at Sadler's Wells. The scenery is always beautiful, but it is not allowed to draw attention from the poet, with whose whole conception it is made to blend in the most perfect harmony. The actors are content also to be subordinated to the play, learn doubtless at rehearsals how to subdue excesses of expression that by giving undue force to one part would destroy the balance of the whole, and blend their work in such a way as to produce everywhere the right emphasis. . . . Mr. Phelps . . . takes heed that every part, even the meanest, shall have in the acting as much prominence as Shakespeare gave it in his plan. . . . We have

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[17]Odell, II. p. 196.

> perceived something like the entire sense of one of Shakespeare's plays, and have been raised above ourselves by the perception.[18]

As one of the most important actor-managers of the nineteenth century, Charles Kean had a passion for archaeology. He diligently sought out minute details for his historically accurate productions. He called in experts, studied documents, and wrote program notes which looked like textbooks. "If he thought the histories were intended to educate the Elizabethans, he proceeded to go lavishly to work on schooling the Victorians, as much by his endless program notes as by the plays themselves."[19] He seemed to believe that by eliminating anachronism, he was returning dramatic unity to Shakespeare. Kean employed over five hundred stagehands to mount his spectacles, but with every new extravagance of scenic accuracy, some additional piece of text had to go.

Because Kean found the sea coast of Bohemia too elusive for his Winter's Tale in 1856, he set the scenes in "Bithynia" and dressed the Bohemian characters in costumes of Asia Minor. It did not bother him, apparently, that Autolycus and the shepherds were omitted. Kean would sacrifice pages of Shakespeare for one theatrical feast for the eyes. In his Richard II of 1857, Kean settled for the barest of dialogue in order to furnish his audience with a demonstration of

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[18]Henry Morley, The Journal of a London Playgoer, 1851-1866 (London: Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1891), pp. 129-130.

[19]Styan, p. 21.

Richard's spectacular entry into London. Likewise The Tempest of the same year included a sumptuous masque, and the shipwreck was contrived to make spectators actually feel seasick. Battles and processions recruited veritable armies of supers. Kean's Merchant of Venice in 1858 "so bustled with life and carnival that a mere pound of flesh dwindled in importance. Squeezing Shakespeare into the scenery rather than the scenery into Shakespeare did not offend those who equated the Shakespeare experience with conspicuous consumption."[20] Charles Kean's influence with archaeological detail extended to America when, in 1845-46, he staged Richard III and King John at the Park Theatre in New York. Mid-Victorian academia rewarded his historical efforts by making him a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

Herbert Beerbohm Tree at Her Majesty's Theatre was Kean's true heir as a magnificent decorator. As Robert Speaight points out, "If Shakespeare described something, Tree did it."[21] At the end of the century, Tree staged A Midsummer Night's Dream which featured live rabbits and a carpet of grass with flowers that could be plucked. The scene changes added forty-five minutes to the playing time, but the pictorial illusion attracted huge crowds. Although critics generally praised the beautiful illusionistic staging, not all were enthusiastic about the play. One reviewer could not regard the lovers as

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[20]Styan, p. 21.

[21]Robert Speaight, Shakespeare on the Stage (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1973), p. 125.

"offering any real interest," and stated that "the goings to and fro of the lovers soon became tedious."[22] The play's only interest seems to have been its display of spectacle. It is significant to note the critical response when F. R. Benson risked a revival of his less spectacular Dream at the Lyceum two months later. The reviewer felt that you got "far more Shakespeare for your money in the more modest production."[23] However, Tree's defense of his production gives insight into his methods and motivations, and indeed the motivations of most actor-managers at the end of the century.

> I am at least entitled to maintain that I have done my best to present the works of Shakespeare in the manner which I consider most worthy, and I feel a certain pride in remembering that, be our method right or wrong, we are enabled to give Shakespeare a wider appeal and a larger franchise - surely no mean achievement. Thousands witness him instead of hundreds. His works are not only, or primarily, for the literary student, they are for the world at large. Indeed, there should be more joy over ninety-nine Philistines that are gained than over one elect that is preserved.[24]

Whatever the influence of Tree's Shakespearean spectacles, the last quarter of the nineteenth century belonged to Henry Irving, whose tenure at the Lyceum from 1878 to 1902 marked the triumph and decline of the old order. Born John Henry Brodribb, Irving played in the provinces from 1856 to 1866. After he came to London, he performed with several leading actors before going to the Lyceum Theatre in 1871 as leading

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[22]Styan, p. 23.

[23]Winter, III, p. 258.

[24]Norman Marshall, The Producer and the Play (London: Macdonald, 1957), pp. 148-149.

man and stage manager. At that time, the Lyceum was under the management of an American, H. L. Bateman. After Bateman died in 1875, his wife continued as manager until 1878, when the Lyceum passed to Irving. Under Irving's management from 1878 to 1898, the Lyceum became the foremost theatre of London. Irving also played throughout England and made eight tours of America. In 1874 his Hamlet ran for 200 nights, a new record for a Shakespearean play. By the time he became manager, he was considered the finest serious actor in London. However, despite the personal fame of Irving and that of his leading lady, Ellen Terry, the reputation of the Lyceum rested upon the total effect of its productions. Building upon the traditions of Macready and Charles Kean, and stimulated by the London appearance of the Meiningen Players in 1881, Irving's work climaxed the trend toward pictorial illusion. The company of Saxe-Meiningen, which Irving admired, set new standards for crowd scenes and ensemble effects.

> About the turn of the century, too, incidental local color effects, street musicians, flirtatious sailors lounging along wharves, old crones telling fortunes beside wishing wells, maids a-spinning, children bobbing for apples, ambulating monks doling out their benedicites - proliferate oppressively, teaching us the double drive inherent in the theatre of the time: toward the cinema, which would discard language entirely and tell the whole story in pictures; and toward the new art of theatre, which would clear the stage of such irrelevant detail and try once more to get back to Shakespeare.[25]

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[25]Charles Shattuck, The Shakespeare Promptbooks (Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1965). p. 12.

The attempt to place on the stage a photographic reproduction of life was widely respected, but it was yet another distraction from the Shakespearean text. Overburdened with scenery, the text continued to be mutilated to accomodate the designer. Shaw said that "In a true republic of art, Henry Irving would have expiated his acting versions on the scaffold. He does not cut plays: he disembowels them."[26] However, the public seemed unaware of the excisions and butchery. Few were troubled when Irving lopped the first act of Coriolanus to avoid playing the soldier, and the last act of The Merchant of Venice after the final exit of his Shylock. As Tyrone Guthrie has explained, "Irving's productions were based on a realistic formula. There would be three or four splendid, elaborate stage pictures, and into these would be crammed as much of the action as possible. The scenes which simply could not be expressed realistically in these three or four environments were either cut or played as front scenes."[27] Although the drive for pictorial illusion was powerful, Irving still strove for tableaux, made his points and then pranced out of scene to accept applause. The actor at this time was set apart from his audience and lines were not spoken to the spectators.

Irving was responsible for several innovations which continued to promote the distancing of actor and audience. He introduced black masking pieces at the front of the stage

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[26]George Bernard Shaw, Dramatic Opinions and Essays (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1913), II, p. 55.

[27]Tyrone Guthrie, In Various Directions: A View of the Theatre (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 62.

to prevent light spill, and consistently darkened the auditorium during performances. His productions continued the tradition of spectacular illusion: bridges for Venice, grass for Arden, and moonlight for lovers. In 1879, Irving commented on the advantages of illusionistic staging.

> Shakespeare, if well acted on a bare stage, would certainly afford great intellectual pleasure; but that pleasure will be all the greater if the eye be charmed, at the same time, by scenic illustrations in harmony with the poet's ideas.[28]

In that same year, he made the same point about the desirability of balance.

> In producing The Merchant of Venice, I have endeavoured to avoid hampering the natural action of the piece with any unnecessary embellishments; but have tried not to omit any accessory which might heighten the effects.[29]

In spite of these statements, the techniques of Henry Irving were in direct opposition to the efforts of those who favored a simpler staging of Shakespeare's plays. By the end of the nineteenth century, essentially Victorian conventions had been substituted for Elizabethan ones.

In America, the theatre was highly influenced by the illusionistic tradition in England. As early as 1798, the Park Theatre was opened in New York where Charles Ciceri and Audin provided elaborate scenery for As You Like It, and later for Hamlet, Henry VIII, and King John. Their productions were said to have "surpassed, for elegance and effect,

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[28] Styan, p. 28.

[29] Ibid.

everything of the kind heretofore seen in America."[30] In 1848, William E. Burton opened his Chambers Street Theatre in New York, where until 1856, he maintained the most respected company in America. Burton, one of the few managers who did not rely upon star performers, gained much acclaim with his Shakespearean productions in historically accurate settings and costumes.

As Robert Speaight states, "The American theatre began as an immigrant theatre, and for a long time continued to be so."[31] The relationship between the two countries was one of reciprocal hospitality and fruitful exchange, especially in the area of theatre. Steadily the stars of the British stage, Kean, Macready, and Irving, made their way across the Atlantic, and "until the turn of the century, and well beyond it, the story continued to be one of stellar performances and productions with Shakespeare squeezed in, never very comfortably, between the stars and the scenery."[32] Most important of the imports, perhaps, was Junius Brutus Booth, whose son, Edwin, became the leading actor of his time. From 1852 to 1856, Edwin Booth toured with various companies before appearing at Burton's Theatre, where he became a major star. In 1863 he leased the Winter Garden Theatre in New York and presented a number of Shakespearean productions which surpassed in quality any yet seen in America. His Hamlet ran for 100 nights. In

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[30]Speaight, Shakespeare on the Stage, p. 71.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., p. 85.

1868, his new Booth's Theatre introduced several innovations. The stage floor was flat and had no grooves. Several elevators were used to raise set pieces from below the stage, and flying machinery raised others above. Thus Booth introduced "free plantation" of scenery many years before it was adopted by Irving in England. Booth's Theatre also had no apron, and box settings increased the illusion of reality.[33] Booth produced on such a lavish scale that by 1874 he was bankrupt.

Another powerful figure in Shakespearean production was Augustin Daly. As producer, Daly's most important work was done after 1879 when he opened Daly's Theatre, his company's third home. After playing in London in 1884, 1886, and 1888, he opened his own theatre there in 1893. Daly contributed much to the development of pictorial illusion. His As You Like It crowded the stage with a forest of real trees.[34] Daly spared no pains in making Shakespeare "presentable," and a good deal of "plastic surgery" went into the operation. He not only rearranged scenes, but could be ruthless in cutting poetry. "If Irving had disproved the managerial lament that 'Shakespeare spells ruin,'. . . Augustin Daly was giving himself a long run for his money by giving Shakespeare a short run for his."[35] His penchant for spectacle was also notorious.

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[33]Oscar Brockett, History of the Theatre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1968), p. 501.

[34]Speaight, p. 80.

[35]Ibid., p. 71.

In A Midsummer Night's Dream the panoramic illusion of Theseus' barge on its way to Athens seemed to Shaw "more absurd than anything that occurs in the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe."[36]

By the turn of the century, the magnificent kind of production associated with Henry Irving, Edwin Booth, and Augustin Daly, was soon to be killed by the cinema, which really could mount a cast of thousands whenever necessary. The theatre was ripe for new concepts in staging. The search began for modern equivalents to the Elizabethan playing conditions, and serious steps were taken toward non-illusory Shakespeare.

Non-Illusory Staging

Despite the emphasis upon illusionistic staging and the public's passion for spectacle, several attempts were made during the nineteenth century to produce Shakespeare with more scenic modesty as well as textual accuracy. As Allardyce Nicoll states, "Not only Irving, but William Poel was anticipated before 1850."[37]

The story of Elizabethan staging in modern times goes back to 1811, when Ludwig Tieck, the German romantic and translator of Shakespeare, called for a reconstructred Globe in which to play Shakespeare as performed in his own time. Tieck had a profound interest in Elizabethan drama and wrote

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[36]Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties, I, pp. 172-173.

[37]Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama 1800-1850 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930), p. 39.

a number of comedies satirizing eighteenth century theatrical devices. Tieck's interest extended far beyond the playwrighting which first introduced him to theatre. By 1820 he was considered Germany's leading authority on theatre because of his critical essays, his performances as a platform reader, and his translations of Shakespeare's plays. Nevertheless, Tieck's ideas about theatrical production were considered impractical. Tieck advocated a more naturalistic style of acting on a platform stage, an approach almost opposite to that popularized by Goethe. Most of Tieck's ideas stemmed from his intensive study of Shakespeare. With the architect Gottfried Semper, he later sought to reconstruct the Fortune Theatre, the first attempt of this kind. Tieck was also the first modern critic to advocate a return to the open stage. He believed that true illusion results from convincing acting and is destroyed by pictorial illusion. In addition, he believed that every element of production should be supervised by a single and autocratic director. Tieck was able to try out his new ideas in 1841, when William IV of Prussia devoted his court theatre at Potsdam to experimental productions. Tieck's most influential production was A Midsummer Night's Dream presented in 1843. For this production, he adapted Elizabethan conventions to a proscenium theatre. Letting the forward part of the stage form a large open space, he constructed a unit to the rear, with curving stairs leading to an acting area eight feet above the stage. The two stairs framed an inner stage on the lower level. The sides of the

stage were masked by tapestries hung at right angles to the proscenium. This production was repeated forty times during the first season at the Berlin theatre, and was imitated by numerous troupes throughout Germany. Because of illness, Tieck was unable to complete another production. Henry V, which he planned without set changes, had to be abandoned. Tieck's work was made possible only because William IV ordered all theatrical personnel to follow Tieck's orders. The bypassing of the permanent managers created considerable friction. After Tieck's retirement, old methods were resumed. Nevertheless, Tieck's ideas were revived and pursued more consistently during the later half of the nineteenth century.

One of the first attempts to revive Elizabethan staging in England was carried out by Benjamin Webster and James Robinson Planche. Planche was responsible for a major step toward antiquarianism in 1823 when he persuaded Charles Kemble to use historically accurate costumes for every role in Shakespeare's King John. The audience welcomed the innovation, and in 1824, both historically accurate costumes and scenery were used for Kemble's Henry IV, Part I. Planche continued to be a leader in the movement toward antiquarianism. Finding it difficult to obtain information for his costume designs, he undertook extensive research which resulted in his History of British Costumes (1834), long the standard English work in this field. Planche also assisted Madame Vestris at the Olympic Theatre from 1831 to 1838.

After 1843, Drury Lane and Covent Garden rapidly lost their positions of dominance, and the Haymarket became London's foremost home for regular drama. Between 1837 and 1853, the Haymarket was managed by Benjamin Webster, also a former member of Madame Vestris' organization. At the Haymarket in 1844 and 1846, Webster and Planche combined their efforts and presented The Taming of the Shrew without scenery except for a backcloth representing a view of London and the Globe Theatre. The production was a curiosity to theatregoers, and the Times correspondent observed a different quality in the performance.

> . . .By mere substitution of one curtain for another, change of scene was indicated, and all the exits and entrances are through the centre of the curtain, or round the screens, the place represented being denoted by a printed placard fastened to the curtain. This arrangement, far from being flat and ineffective, tended to give closeness to the action, and by constantly allowing a great deal of stage room, afforded a sort of freedom to all the parties engaged. The audience did not in the least seem to feel the absence of scenery, and though the play lasted three hours and a half, the attention of the house never failed, and a play could scarcely go off with more spirit.[38]

There is no way of knowing what the reviewer meant by "closeness to the action." Evidently he was not referring to the pace since the play lasted three and a half hours, but perhaps the play's continuity, since he states that "the attention of the house never failed." Perhaps he also referred to a new relationship between the audience and the action of the play. The audience may have felt more a part of the action,

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[38] Times (London), 18 March 1844, p. 5.

without the distancing of illusionistic distractions. However, it is "a sort of freedom" which is the most revealing phrase. The freedom afforded was obviously more than spatial, and as J. L. Styan states, it inevitably "points to the spirit and mode of the playing."[39]

Another force which influenced the reforms of Elizabethan staging in the nineteenth century was the Meiningen Players of Germany. Although they did not perform on a platform stage, they did much to influence Shakespearean production throughout Europe. Their director and producer, Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, received extensive art training and had been at the Prussian court in Berlin at the time when Tieck was working there. He also had seen Charles Kean's Shakespearean productions in London. In 1874 he reorganized the company at his court theatre with the deliberate intention of reforming the methods of acting and scene design on the German stage. Although he was an accomplished painter, he did not merely make a picture of the settings. He went further than just considering how the actor would look in the setting; he considered how the setting would influence and control the movements of the actor. In collaboration with his stage director, Ludwig Chronegk, the Duke trained his actors to abandon all the stagey conventions of gesture and speech, and strive for a more naturalistic portrayal of character. Although the Duke was not the originator of naturalism and historical accuracy, he developed them further than his English predecessors. The

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[39]Styan, p. 48.

Meiningen Company appeared for a season at Drury Lane in 1881, and London critics were particularly impressed with the ensemble playing, the coordination of crowd scenes, and the naturalistic approach to Shakespeare.

There were several other forces at work in the later half of the century which affected Elizabethan revivals. Many of these were innovations in staging which continued the movement away from illusionism. An early step toward more simplified staging was taken by Frank R. Benson. After acting with Irving, Benson founded his own troupe in 1883 and continued to tour the provinces in a Shakespearean repertory until 1933. Benson produced most of the plays at the annual festival at Stratford-on-Avon (instituted in 1879) between 1886 and 1913, and after 1900 gave a few performances in London each year. Benson began by producing in the style of Irving, but by 1900 had reduced the scenic background to a few stock settings and was placing primary emphasis upon actors. Although his solution was quite often a compromise, Benson helped to make simplified staging acceptable to the public.

Another producer who spread the concept of simplified staging was Philip Ben Greet. For thirty years he toured his Shakespeare company throughout England and America, playing mainly to schools. Whenever possible he performed in the open air, otherwise in a hall or gymnasium. To a man of Greet's boundless enthusiasm, these conditions were no obstacle. J. C. Trewin tells of his penchant for impromtu. "Just as

Mr. Wemmick said in effect, 'Halloa! Here's a church! Let's have a wedding!' so Greet would say, 'Here's a lawn! Let's do the Dream!'"[40] Under these circumstances he could not rely on scenery or lighting to help in creating illusion, and his groupings and movement had to adapt to stages of every size and shape. Greet taught his company, recruited mainly from young and inexperienced actors, to characterize their parts in bold outline and then rely on clear, vigorous speech and a strict regard for the scansion of lines. In carrying his message of Elizabethan reform, Greet encountered the same obstacles in America that other producers were facing elsewhere in the world. He was competing with the overblown, illusionistic productions of managers such as Edwin Booth and Augustin Daly. In an interview in the New York Sun, Greet stated that in America, the only work in the reform of Elizabethan staging was being done in the universities.[41] Reviewers continually criticized his enthusiastic, yet sparsely furnished productions. In response to their attacks, Greet said,

> I shall give a farewell performance of Shakespeare as the critics want it. I shall print on my announcement "As you like it" in very small letters so it will not obtrude itself on the sight and "with scenery" so you can read it half a mile away.[42]

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[40] J. C. Trewin, Shakespeare on the English Stage 1900-1964 (London: Barrie and Lockliff, 1964), p. 14.

[41] New York Sun, 24 March 1907, sec. 2, p. 3.

[42] Ibid.

Eventually, American theatre was influenced by those attempts at Elizabethan reform in other parts of the globe, and especially the touring companies of men such as Ben Greet.

It must be remembered in discussing these early attempts at Elizabethan staging, that nineteenth century directors and producers knew very little about the Elizabethan stage. The DeWitt drawing of the Swan Theatre was then unknown. Not until 1888 did Dr. K. T. Gaedertz print this crude sketch of an Elizabethan playhouse stage. The publication of the drawing spawned many conjectures and influenced a number of late nineteenth century stagings of Shakespeare.

Beginning in 1889 at the Royal Court Theatre in Munich, Karl von Perfall and Jocza Savitts attempted to approximate the Elizabethan plan with a structure erected on a picture frame stage. Savitts, director of the Royal Theatre, gave his first Elizabethan production of King Lear in 1890. He had been urged to this by Baron Perfall, Intendant of the Royal Theatre, who regretted that the more spectacular productions of Saxe-Meiningen should be over-shadowing the prestige of Munich. Savitts then suggested, by way of complete contrast, a return to Elizabethan methods. He received permission for this and adapted his stage for the purpose. It was typical of similar approaches then being tried in several countries. For example, Andre Antoine's adaptation at the Odeon in Paris shows the influence of reforms in simplified staging, and the work of Max Reinhardt and Ernst Stern utilized staging conventions from many periods.

These then were some of the most important movements of the nineteenth century away from the traditions of pictorial illusion which had been carried on by men such as Henry Irving and Edwin Booth. These were the first attempts to break away the picture frame of romantic illusion and realistic detail, and to revive the spirit as well as the structure of Shakespeare's stage. These were also the movements which influenced the theory and practice of two of the most important innovators in Elizabethan staging, George Pierce Baker and William Poel.

Chapter III

THE ELIZABETHAN STAGING THEORIES OF BAKER AND POEL

Baker's Theory of Elizabethan Staging

In his book, The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, George Pierce Baker begins by stating that an understanding of any work of art necessitates an understanding of the artist and the environment in which he creates. "Any great work of art is neither accidental nor wholly individual. It is the product of the individual reacting on his inheritance of technique and his social environment. It marks the highest stage in some artistic evolution. In any genuinely critical study of Shakespeare's work these trite facts should never be forgotten."[1]

It was Baker's knowledge of and keen interest in the Elizabethan theatre which helped formulate his theories concerning the production of Shakespeare's plays. He was very much aware of the relationship between the artist and his art, the player and the play. Baker possessed a remarkable practical knowledge of Elizabethan drama, which enabled him to assist his students not only to visualize the plays, but to recreate for an audience, the Elizabethan experience. His understanding

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[1]George Pierce Baker, The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), p. 1.

of Elizabethan drama was grounded in a firm knowledge of the staging of those dramas. Such a practical approach to the plays of the period helped him form certain theories about Elizabethan staging and assisted him as a participant and director of the drama.

One of Baker's most important theories was that a play must be viewed with a perspective of its own time period. Baker wished to dispel the idea that there are certain standards by which the plays of any period may be declared good or bad, without regard for the time in which a play was written, the public for whom it was written, or the stage on which it was acted.[2] Baker realized that the work of Shakespeare could not be fully appreciated without an understanding of these conditions. This is perhaps one reason for his success as a teacher. He demanded from his young playwrights certain basic principles which he recognized in the work of Shakespeare. Professor Baker was fond of quoting the playwright Arthur Pinero in saying, "Every dramatist whose ambition it is to produce live plays is absolutely bound to study carefully, and I may even add respectfully - at any rate not contemptuously - the conditions that hold good for his own age and generation. One of the great rules - perhaps the only universal rule - of the drama is that 'you cannot pour new wine into old skins!'"[3] Baker stated that there

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[2]Ibid., p. 3.

[3]Arthur Wing Pinero, Robert Louis Stevenson, the Dramatist (New York: Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, 1914), pp. 29-30.

are common characteristics of all great drama, fundamental principles in dramatic composition, without which a play could not be a play. But these common characteristics are relatively few as compared with the characteristics of the plays of any epoch or of any writer which result from the public, and from the stage for which they are written.

According to Baker, there is far too little understanding of the characteristics of Shakespeare's stage, on the part of the audience as well as the director, and he cites this as a reason for the poor reception of his plays. Baker states that, in imitating Shakespearean drama, it is because we have not kept these characteristics in mind, that we resort to productions which are "mere feeble reflections of Shakespeare's splendor foredoomed to only a momentary success."[4] By "imitating the Shakespearean drama," Baker refers to those producers who are content to imitate each other and rely upon what was fashionable, rather than return to any original conditions of the Elizabethan experience.

> The imitators forget that no play can have lasting popularity which neglects the prejudices, tastes, and above all the ideals of its own day. That we find delight in Shakespeare's plays today does not alter the fact that had he written for us he could not have written exactly as he did for the Elizabethan. Therefore, to judge his plays technically by other standards than those of the time for which he wrote them is illogical.[5]

Baker felt that the study of the artist and his time together with the art form was particularly valuable in drama. He seems

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[4]Baker, The Development of Shakespeare, p. 5.

[5]Ibid., pp. 5-6.

to agree with Edelstand Du Meril in his Introduction to Histoire de la Comedie.

> In the drama the personality of the author is effaced even more completely than in the epic or other forms of poetry . . . . It is no longer he who speaks . . . . All figures return successfully to life . . . . Each of the dramatic personae acts for himself and speaks according to the ideas and sentiments that are peculiarly his own. You assist at a genuine representation of life, and follow step by step the consequences of acts . . . . But the inspiration of the work hasn't at all that egotistical spirit, disdainful of the outside world, which characterizes the other forms of art; this is no longer a monologue of the poet singing to himself for his own pleasure; this author tries by what his drama represents to awake in others the poetical ideas which have inspired him and are for him real . . . . The serious end of the drama depends, then, upon the ideas of the poet . . . and his ideas are intimately bound up with the religion and the philosophy of his time . . . . If a dramatist doesn't wish to employ his gifts in an effort condemned to failure in advance, he must, - and this is one of the first duties of the artist, - he must consider his public, respect their sentiments, and skillfully conform himself to their ideas and customs.[6]

Mr. Baker often stated that a certain pliability on the part of the playwright was not only desirable, but necessary. It was also no indication, he added, of "truckling to one's audience."[7] Baker had certain theories concerning various aspects in the production process and are discussed in the following order: text, stage, staging, technical elements, acting and audience.

It was Baker's theory that the text of an Elizabethan play should be evaluated according to its original intent,

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[6]Edelstand Pontas Du Meril, Histoire de la Comedie, Primitive Period (Paris: Didier and Co.,1864),I,Introduction, p. 7.

[7]Baker, p. 7.

that is, words and actions performed for an audience. The text should be understood for its performance value as well as its literary value. As he stated, "the Elizabethan dramatists, with the exception of Ben Jonson, wrote with an eye single to the stage."[8] It was the "acting quality" which made a play popular in its own time, and indeed keeps it successful even today. "What wonder that these Elizabethan plays, with all their faults from the point of dramatic technique as it is understood today, show when revived an acting quality that suprises! This very acting quality means merely that they were so skillfully fitted to one public as to acquire certain permanent qualities of dramatic appeal."[9]

In The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, Baker continually admonishes us to approach the plays as did the Elizabethans. He spends considerable time reminding us that the Elizabethan public went to the theatre primarily to hear a good story. Our modern interpretations, he claims, have often placed emphasis on other aspects of the plays and overlooked the simple story value of the text. Our treatments of the great Shakespearean tragedies serve as an example.

> First of all, let us make sure whether our approach to these tragedies is that of the Elizabethans. Have we not grown used to seeing some distinguished actor or actress emphasize a particular character in one of them with such interpretative art that the play henceforth stands in our minds as first of all a great study in human passion or desire? That surely is what has made Professor Bradley, the most interesting of our recent writers on Shakespeare's dramatic art, say: "One reason

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[8]Baker, p. 17.

[9]Ibid., p. 19.

> why the end of The Merchant of Venice fails to satisfy us is that Shylock is a tragic character and that we cannot believe in his accepting his defeat and the conditions imposed on him. This was a case where Shakespeare's imagination ran away with him, so that he drew a figure with which the destined pleasant ending would not harmonize." Could anything mark more clearly a judgment affected by such presentation of Shylock as Sir Henry Irving's?[10]

It was also Baker's theory that modern audiences fail to understand the rapidity and flow with which the Elizabethan text was delivered. Our custom of dividing a script into acts and scenes was not a common practice among the Elizabethans. Anyone who is familiar with the quarto versions of Elizabethan plays needs no proof that in many cases the scenes were first marked off when the manuscript was prepared for the printer. The very absence, so evident in Elizabethan plays, of the modern effort to provide a strong climax at the end of the act as marked, strengthens one's doubt whether the dramatists of Shakespeare's time had at all the same idea of an act that we have today. Baker felt that for them, it was probably more a period of time than a literary unit. "When it is easy to divide one of their plays into acts according to modern ideas, that is much more probably the result of their recognition of permanent laws governing dramatic exposition within the space of two and a half hours than because they had our notion of an act."[11] As an example of his theory concerning the rapid delivery of the Elizabethan text, Baker cites the fourth act of

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[10]Baker, pp. 268-269.

[11]Ibid., pp. 265-266.

Antony and Cleopatra and urges us to view the play, not with the cumbersome scene changes of a modern production, but with the swift continuity of the Elizabethan theatre experience.

> No one, certainly, in reading the fourth act of Antony and Cleopatra, can fail to see the scrappiness of the fifteen scenes which make it. . . . But let us approach the play in a different mood. First of all, we are Elizabethans seeing it on a stage which allows the scenes to follow one another almost instantly. They have not, therefore, the effect of detached and separate pictures, but rather, instantly following one another, make us. . . swiftly understand, as we watch Antony under many different conditions, his gnawing shame for his cowardice at Actium, or give us speedily and vividly bits of information which we must comprehend if the events of the fifth act are to be clear to us.[12]

With his knowledge of English theatre history, Baker was aware of the evolution of the Elizabethan stage as well as its fundamental properties. He showed the extraordinary advantages which that stage afforded actor, audience and playwright. Dramatists, he explained, did not then consider their stage to be a rigid, fixed mechanism such as the twentieth century inherited from the nineteenth. Instead, they had the advantage of working with what he called a "supremely plastic" instrument which could be "planned for whatever they desired."[13] It was Baker's theory that the Elizabethan stage was properly fitted to represent the life of the period as seen by the playwright. "If the stage of the moment forbids in any way the just representation of life, so much the worse for that stage; it must yield. The ingenuity of author,

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[12]Baker, pp. 270-271.

[13]Kinne, p. 122.

producer, scenic artist, and stage mechanician must labor until the stage is fitted to represent life as the author sees it."[14]

Baker believed that the Elizabethan stage evolved from the pageant wagons and platforms of the fifteenth and sixteenth century Morality plays. "A curtain could be stretched at the back of the platform so as to give a middle and two side entrances. . . . The performances took place in front of them without scenery of any kind; without any protection from the weather, and with no possibility of any dividing up of the stage unless some space was left behind the curtain where tableaux effects could be disclosed."[15] From these make-shift beginnings, Baker stated, actors discovered that the use of innyards, with their two or three galleries surrounding a courtyard, were well-suited for their purposes and provided them with a second stage, namely, the space in the first balcony.[16] When the actors constructed a permanent home of their own in 1576, it was Baker's theory that they combined the structure of bear-baiting rings with the innyards. But Baker felt that the circular shape of the ring was a definite improvement because it brought the audience closer to the stage and the action of the play.

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[14]Baker, Dramatic Technique (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919), p. 15.

[15]Baker, The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, pp. 67-68.

[16]Ibid., pp. 68-69.

Baker stated that on certain characteristics of the Elizabethan theatre there is agreement; namely, that the flying of a flag above the "heavens" gave notice of a performance; that the stage was strewn with rushes; that the trumpet sounded three times before the prologue came out to speak; that he appeared on a little balcony high upon the right side of the "heavens"; that the music room was on one side of the stage or at times just behind it; that the tiring room was but a short distance behind the rear exits of the stage; that the earlier Globe at least, the Swan, the earlier Fortune, and the Hope had "heavens"; that there were both upper and lower stages, as in the innyards; and that a mechanism concealed somewhere, probably in the hut of the "heavens," allowed heavy properties to be lowered upon the stage.[17] There was dispute or vagueness in regard to other aspects of the Elizabethan theatre. These included the seating capacity; spectators on the upper stage; signs for the name of the play and the placing of the scenes; the number of exits; the use of hangings or curtains on the stage, and whether they were called "curtains" or "arras"; the presence of scenery of any kind; and the exact purpose of the second hut behind that over the "heavens." Baker is quick to point out that there was probably no one Elizabethan or Jacobean playhouse which was completely typical, and that they differed according to their age as well as the ingenuity of the companies.[18]

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[17]Baker, pp. 69-70.

[18]Ibid.

From his own study of the quartos and folios, and from practical experience in reproducing Elizabethan plays, Baker was able to draw his own conclusions concerning these disputed questions. Baker felt that multiple curtains were used which permitted various arrangements of space on the Elizabethan stage. As Baker states, "the stage directions of the plays provide no decisive proof on the question. I think, however, that no one who studies them carefully, especially if he has also an opportunity to stage a revival of one of the Elizabethan plays, can fail to feel that some of the theatres at certain times had a curtain or curtains somewhere on the front stage, probably between the pillars of the 'heavens!'"[19] Although he admits there is much conflicting evidence concerning the presence of such a curtain, he points out that "it is worth noting that in the revivals under Mr. Poel by the Elizabethan Stage Society of London and in the revivals at Harvard University, two wholly independent experiments, a front curtain has been used."[20]

Baker also suggests that signs indicating location would have been unlikely in such a non-illusory and descriptive theatre. "For myself, I believe that there never were signs saying merely, 'This is a street,' 'This is a house,' etc., and that, though signs bearing the titles of plays may well have been displayed, the use of signs to denote special places was old, decreasing, and by 1600 unusual."[21]

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[19]Baker, p. 86.

[20]Ibid., p. 87.

[21]Ibid., pp. 79-80

Baker's thought on the general lay-out of the Elizabethan stage reinforce his theory of the plasticity of Shakespeare's theatre.

> I have no doubt that Shakespeare during the greater part of his career as a dramatist could use practically four divisions on his stage; front, inner, back, and upper stage, with three curtains, one in the balcony, another under the balcony, and a third somewhere in front. I would not maintain, however, that this held good for all theatres, not even for any one theatre throughout its whole history. These possibilities permitted any skilled dramatist an alteration of scenes when he desired, but did not exact it as some writers seem to think, and allowed him to run off his play rapidly, finishing it easily in two hours and a half.[22]

It was Baker's opinion that Shakespeare illustrates the importance for any dramatist of the conditions of his own stage. He felt that the curious arrangement of the Elizabethans' inner, outer, upper, and back stage made possible a rapid succession of scenes. He cited the advantages of such a stage over a modern stage with its necessarily long waits for the shifting of scenes, its excisions, or its rearrangements. Although not a purist in the staging of Shakespeare's plays, Baker felt that to tamper with the order of Shakespeare's scenes is dramatically unpardonable. "Condense we must at times, because of the cumbersomeness of this scenery-ridden modern stage, but we may condense with discretion and success."[23] It was also Baker's opinion that in the great majority of his plays, Shakespeare consciously aimed at a total effect from the thoughtful and skillful handling of a multitude of details.

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[22]Baker, p. 96.

[23]Ibid., p. 307.

"Change his order, cut out whole scenes, and the very effects for which even Shakespeare labored become impossible."[24]

According to Baker the absence of elaborate scenery would actually enhance the descriptive quality of Shakespeare's plays. He also said that the relatively small size of most Elizabethan theatres and the use of a stage thrust far into the pit made possible a certain intimacy and delicacy which offset the fact that the theatres were open to the sky and not so easy to hear in as modern theatres. "One sometimes wonders that the Elizabethan audience was sensitive enough to enjoy the scenes of quiet poetical monologue or of delicate touches of characterization, but one wonders no longer after seeing a careful revival of one of these plays, - not simply the curious archaeological botches which are too often palmed off on an unsuspecting public as Elizabethan stages."[25] Baker made it clear that he was not urging a return to Elizabethan stage conditions, but he felt strongly "that the plays of any period can be judged accurately only under the stage conditions for which they were written, and that we should not today, both in revivals and in plays of the present, swamp what is essential and distort the intended effect by an over-elaborate presentation."[26]

Although Baker's theory did not include a system for the interpretation of the Elizabethan text, he was well aware of

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[24]Baker, p. 307.

[25]Ibid., pp. 307-308.

[26]Ibid., pp. 308-309.

the relationship between the ideas of the poet and their expression by the actor. He continually stressed the importance of the actor. As an illustration, he quoted a passage from Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy.

> O eyes! no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears;
> O life! no life, but lively form of death.
> O world! no world, but mass of public wrongs,
> Confus'd and fill'd with murder and misdeeds:
> O sacred heav'ns! if this unhallow'd deed,
> If this inhuman, and barbarous attempt;
> If this incomparable murder thus,
> Of mine, but now no more my son,
> Shall unreveal'd and unrevenged pass,
> How should we term your dealings to be just,
> If you unjustly deal with those that in your justice trust?[27]

This passage, Baker admits, is fantastically mannered if read without sympathetic imagination and emotion; for here is an example of the Elizabethan dramatist's awareness that on the stage, it is emotion, more than thought, which hits home to the audience. "Did even the remotest spectator in the old Elizabethan theatre, in order to understand that here was an aged father agonized at the death of his son, need more than to see the poses, facial expressions, and gestures of the actor, and to hear the tones of his voice? What do the words matter? Enter sympathetically into the feeling of the lines, disregarding the separate words, and then let the voice color the lines."[28] It was Baker's opinion that in spite of its highly mannered phrase, the speech would carry its emotional appeal even today.

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[27]Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy, edited by Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1959), III, ii, 1-11, p. 52.

[28]Baker, p. 33.

Baker comments on actor training in an Elizabethan company and laments the fact that no equivalent of this training program exists for the modern actor. He cites the long and intensive training period for the Elizabethan actor as well as the opportunity to rise within the ranks of a company and develop skills in other areas such as theatre-management or playwrighting. Baker dismisses the modern skepticism that boy actors could adequately portray heroines of Elizabethan drama. "Much of the current wonder that Shakespeare's heroines could have been adequately represented by boys and youths vanishes if one knows the contemporary evidence as to their exceeding skill and realizes how long, thorough, and varied the training of an Elizabethan actor could be."[29] Nor was the training of young actors confined to these companies. The training of choir boys, such as those at Chapel Royal and St. Paul's,[30] was equally rigorous.

> . . . Acting occasionally at Court and daily before the public was, at least from 1580 to 1608, as important a part of the duties of these boys as their work as choristers. Trained at first chiefly to act what was graceful, they passed to creation of exceedingly difficult roles. . . . Think what these companies of boys must have meant to acting as an art! Of course not all the boys, when their voices broke, took advantage of the provisions existing to send them to the higher schools or universities, but some must have gone into the men's companies; and it is by no means unlikely that even some of those who went to the schools, and even perhaps the universities, turned to acting or to dramatic writing later. . . . How much all this training at the most pliable period must have

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[29]Baker, pp. 56-57.

[30]William Shakespeare, Hamlet, edited by George Pierce Baker (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922), p. 181.

> expedited development into mature actors or playwrights! When one recalls this training and remembers that in all the companies there were, also, "players' boys" who were learning the art of acting, one sees that by the age of twenty a youth might have had twelve years of steady practice in a great round of male and female parts under instruction from the best actors, musicians, and dancing masters of the time. Does it still seem strange that Shakespeare, with such schools of acting existing, consented to intrust his heroines to these beardless youths?[31]

The Elizabethan playwright, according to Baker, knew every peculiarity and device of the stage on which his play would be presented; he did not write, as do playwrights of the twentieth century, for countless stages with innumerable differences. He did not write for many companies, some of which the dramatist of today never sees in his plays, but for a company so well known to him that even as he wrote, he could hear the voices of the men and boys who would play his heroes and heroines. He did not write for a hydra-headed composite called the public, but for a group of people well known to him from their repeated patronage.[32]

Another important aspect of Baker's philosophy was his belief that Shakespeare wrote for an audience which read very little and for whom the theatre performed the functions of the modern communication media. "The theatre filled not only the place it occupies now, but the place of the magazine, illustrated histories, biographies, and books of travel, and even of the yellow journal."[33] Baker states that the Elizabethan

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[31]Baker, pp. 61-62.

[32]Ibid., pp. 18-19.

[33]Ibid., p. 11.

went to see and hear a play in a mood which was delightfully childlike. Therefore Shakespeare found the greater part of his audience had but a single critical standard: Does it interest me? "It is doubtful if, even when trained by the best work of Shakespeare himself, Elizabethan playgoers rose as a group to the interest of our audiences in characterization. What they demanded first of all in a play was story."[34] This, Baker states, explains the great emphasis in Elizabethan drama on plot as contrasted with the modern theatre's emphasis on characterization, and illustrates the effect of the public on the playwright.

In summing up his theories of Elizabethan staging, Baker states that though the stage of Shakespeare was different from those of the twentieth century, it was by no means ill-equipped, and in fact responded quite adequately to the developing needs of theatre. It did call for more imagination and sympathetic response from the audience; but the actors, thrust into the midst of the audience, could get a quicker response than modern actors who, according to Baker, "are always framed in like a picture."[35]

> In a word, the conditions of the Shakespearean stage were intimate to an extent we scarcely realize and permitted a detail not always possible in our larger theatres. Above all, everything in the performance tended to make the play the thing: no lavish scenery drew off the attention, properties were usually employed only to the extent that the play demanded; there were no "stars," and both actor and hearer must give themselves up to the author, the one to interpret,

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[34]Baker, p. 13.

[35]Ibid., p. 98.

> the other to understand, if the play was to produce its full effect. Is it not evident that, for the dramatist, conditions were far better than today, indeed, well-nigh perfect?[36]

Poel's Theory of Elizabethan Staging

During the winter of 1878, when he was on tour in the provinces, giving recitals from Shakespeare and performing in whatever space was available, William Poel began to form his theories of Elizabethan staging. From his own performances and those he observed, he began to develop certain ideas about the performing of Shakespeare. He was growing convinced that Shakespeare and his fellow Elizabethans could not adequately be contained within the limits of the proscenium stage; that they were harmed by realistic scenery; and that the rhythm of the plays was destroyed by the intervals and omissions which these accessories imposed. He had come to see, and began to preach that Shakespeare the poet was his own scene painter and electrician. He believed that although Shakespeare had indeed written for all time, he had not written out of his own time; that he had seen the world through Elizabethan eyes, and that vision must be recovered in order to do him justice.

It was Poel's theory, and in fact his obsession, which called for a revival of the historical Shakespeare. In a paper read before the Elizabethan Literary Society in 1893, Poel quoted John Ruskin's opinion when he states, "it is a constant law that the greatest poets and historians live entirely in

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[36]Baker, pp. 98-99.

their own age, and the greatest fruits of their work are gathered out of their own age."[37] Poel continues by saying that the structure of Shakespeare's plays was shaped by the structure of his theatre, and only through an examination of the physical stage can we appreciate the true genius of his artistic construction.

> Shakespeare and his companions were inspired by the prolific energies of their day. Their material was their own and their neighbors' experiences, and their plays were shaped to suit the theatre of the day and no other. It is therefore reasonable for the serious critic and historian to anticipate some increase of knowledge from a thorough examination of the Elizabethan theatre in close conjunction with the Elizabethan drama. Students who reject this method will always fail to realize the essential characteristic of one of the greatest ages of English dramatic poetry, while he who adopts it may confidently expect revelations of interest, not only to the playgoer, but to all who devote attention to dramatic literature.[38]

Poel, as we have seen, began his work by going back to the text, and one of his primary concerns was always how the text should be spoken. If we could recover the secret of Elizabethan speech, Poel felt that we should have a clearer idea of how a play by Shakespeare was meant to sound. His purpose in going back to the First Quarto was to get as near as possible to the prompt book. He proved by experiment in 1881, that if you acted a Shakespearean play without intervals, and no intervals or act divisions were indicated either in the First or Second Quarto texts, it was no mere figure of speech to talk about the "two hours' traffic of our stage."[39]

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[37]William Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1913), p. 5.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., p. 17.

Poel states that neither in the theatre of his day nor on the printed page did Shakespeare's dramas reflect the form of his art or the thought of his age. The versions acted on the stage were unlike those read in the study, and all were dissimilar to what Poel referred to as the "authentic copies."[40] Poel notes several special features of these "authentic copies" or early quartos which make them valuable for study.

> 1. The title-pages, which indicate what in Shakespeare's time were the popular incidents and characters in each play.
> 2. The unbroken continuity of the story, the plays having no divisions to suggest where pauses were made, if any, during the presentation.
> 3. Some descriptive stage directions which do not reappear in subsequent editions, and which in all probability are authentic evidence of the action as it was seen on the stage.[41]

Poel stated that these quartos are the only playbooks in existence which can show Shakespeare's constructive art as a dramatist. He points out that in the First Folio, Heminge and Condell began making divisions for intervals in the plays. "This was an innovation, probably suggested to them by the booksellers at the instigation of Ben Jonson. Fortunately, the editors left their task unfinished, finding perhaps that these divisions were unsuitable interpolations."[42]

To strengthen his case for the use of the early quartos and an unbroken text, Poel reminds us that of the plays wholly written by Shakespeare, with the exception of The Tempest, all

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[40]Poel, p. 31.

[41]Ibid., pp. 31-32.

[42]Ibid., p. 32.

are so constructed that the characters who leave the stage at the end of an episode are never the first to reappear, a reappearance which would involve a short pause and an empty stage; nor does a character who ends one of the acts marked in the folio ever begin the one that follows.

> Can we reasonably suppose, then, that a method so consistently carried out by Shakespeare throughout all his plays respecting the exit and the reentrance of characters was due to mere accident, and not to deliberate intention on the part of the dramatist? And in acted drama the exact position where a pause comes in the movement of the story is a matter of importance to the proper understanding of the play. Yet, in the first collected edition of Shakespeare's plays the divisions made are so irrelevant to the story that Heminge and Condell may have considered them as merely ornamental.[43]

Poel states that a slavish adherence to these divisions has caused the representation of Shakespeare's plays to be in most cases unintelligent, if not almost unintelligible. According to Poel, the divisions have also misled scholars as to Shakespeare's method of dramatic construction. "Until editors ignore the acts and scenes in the folio edition of 1623 and take the form of the play as it appears in the quartos - that is, without divisions - no progress can be made with the study of Shakespeare's dramatic art. It is now more generally recognized, especially by American scholars, that the folio divisions are a real stumbling block and must go overboard."[44]

Poel felt that the text must be studied in light of the physical Elizabethan stage. He firmly believed that Shakespeare

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[43]Poel, p. 41.

[44]Ibid., p. 42.

invented his dramatic construction to suit his particular playhouse. Except for these special conditions of his theatre, Shakespeare's drama could never have come into being. Poel felt that Shakespeare's genius was not adapted to writing plays with intervals for music, as was done at court. "Unity of design was his aim. 'Scene individable' is his motto."[45] Poel explained that the internal evidence of the plays themselves proves this to be true.

It was also Poel's theory that the story value of the text was upper most in Elizabethan minds. He felt that Elizabethan audiences were absorbed by the story of the play, and thought little about lapse of time or change of place.

> There was only one locality recognized, and that one was the platform, which projected to the center of the auditorium, where the story was recited. There was, besides, only one period, and that was "now," meaning the moment at which the events were being talked about or acted. All inconsistencies, then, that are apparent in the text, arising from change of place or break in the time, should be ignored in representing the play.[46]

Poel states that there was no advantage in rearranging the order of scenes, or lowering the curtain, or pausing in the progress of the story in order to call attention to a change of place or interval of time. "Whatever information Shakespeare wished the audience to have on these matters, he put into the mouths of his characters, and he expected the audience to accept it without any questioning or further illustration."[47] Poel

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[45]Poel, p. 43.

[46]Ibid., pp. 43-44.

[47]Ibid., p. 44.

compared Shakespeare's method to Elizabethan folk-songs which are sung without pausing between the verses. This method, he explained, fixes the attention on the story. "Shakespeare obtains the same result by dispensing with the empty stage."[48]

Poel continually stressed that the Elizabethan stage had no scenery. His emphasis upon a bare platform stage was due in large part to a reaction against the scenic accessories of his own day. Shakespeare, Poel believed, considered it to be the business of the dramatist to describe the scene, and to call attention to each change in locality, and he did this so skillfully that his scenic descriptions appear to be a part of the natural dialogue of the play. "The naked action was assisted by the poetry; and much that now seems superfluous in the descriptive passages was needed to excite imagination."[49] Poel repeated the allegations of Halliwell Phillips when he said,

> There can be no doubt that Shakespeare, in the composition of his plays, could not have contemplated the introduction of scenic accessories. It is fortunate that this should have been one of the conditions of his work, for otherwise many a speech of power and beauty, many an effective situation. would have been lost. All kinds of elaborate attempts at stage illusion tend, moreover, to divert a careful observance of the acting, while they are of no real service to the imagination.[50]

Poel also felt that the poet's disregard of time and place was justified by the conditions of the stage. This left everything

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[48]Poel, p. 44.

[49]Ibid., p. 7.

[50]Ibid.

to the intelligence as well as the imagination of the audience. Shakespeare, he felt, could not have failed to recognize that by employing the existing conventions of his stage, he could more readily sway the public to his point of view, since its thoughts were not being diverted and distracted by "those outward decorations and subordinate details which in our day so greatly obliterate the main object of dramatic work."[51]

Poel came to feel that it was impossible to test his theories of Elizabethan staging in the conditions of Victorian theatre, and all the time he was directing and performing his recitals, he was trying to recreate in his own mind the stage for which the plays had been written. Poel saw that the Elizabethan stage, with its daylight, its multiple planes, and its wide projecting platform made possible a special kind of realism.[52] The audience was in the play, not in front of it. The action of the play was not in Rome or Alexandria; it was here and now. It was Elizabethan and immediate. An Elizabethan performance was essentially an experiment with time. The eyes of the audience were never invited to leave the walls of the playhouse structure, but their imaginations were asked to superimpose upon them the visible world of the dramatist. The dramatist who knew his business was quick to indicate locations, and therefore he and the audience did the scene shifting. There was no effort to create illusion, but there was a mutual imaginative effort which meant that actors could

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[51]Poel, p. 8.

[52]Ibid., p. 9.

be Romeo or Othello and also Elizabethan Englishmen. The platform could be London by day or Verona by night. The architecture of the Globe provided Juliet's balcony and Juliet's bedroom with no more trouble than drawing a curtain; just as it provided Ophelia's grave, below the trap, and Orlando's tree, one of the forward pillars. The Elizabethan stage was a map of anywhere, and when a landscape was required, the poet was at hand to paint it.

It was the lack of rules for Elizabethan staging which excited Poel's imagination as director. In a letter to the Elizabethan scholar, William J. Lawrence, Poel states,

> I am particularly glad to see you lay emphasis on the fact that it is almost impossible to insist on any rules for Elizabethan staging, beyond the need for great adaptability according to what theatre was being used or hall, and what play was being acted. And the dramatists knowing that their plays would not always be acted in the same building would be careful not to be too dogmatic in stage directions.[53]

Poel also expresses his interest in Lawrence's theory concerning a second curtain, which Poel used in his production of Hamlet in 1900.

> I forget what is your idea about the Traverse. I mean the lower one, nearest the audience, that might have gone between the two pillars; not that I think they did go there, but probably obliquely across the rear of the stage. It was at best a temporary arrangement, and probably only used for some plays. I am quite against William Archer's emphatic declaration that there was no second Traverse at all.[54]

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[53]Robert Speaight, William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 84.

[54]Ibid.

Referring to the construction of the theatres, Poel said it is important to note that they differed most from modern playhouses in their size; not so much in the size of the stage as in the dimensions of the auditorium. The building was so constructed that the remotest spectator could hardly have been more than a dozen yards from the front of the stage. The entire audience was therefore within a hearing distance which could convey the slightest modulation of the actor's voice, and at the same time demanded no exaggerated effort in the more sonorous speeches. Poel states that such a building would be especially well adapted for the skilled and rapid delivery for which Elizabethan players were famous, and in regard to sight lines, he added, "every lineament of the actor's countenance would have been visible without telescopic aid."[55] He agreed with Halliwell Phillips that Shakespeare's theatre was "one wherein an actor of genius could satisfactorily develop to every one of the audience not merely the written, but the unwritten words of the drama, those latter which are expressed by gesture or by the subtle language of the face and eye."[56]

In regard to the use of signs to indicate place, Poel felt that they were used infrequently, and were the exception rather than the rule. He says that as far as the plays of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson are concerned, the employment of signs was unlikely, and in most cases, unnecessary.

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[55]Poel, p. 10.

[56]Ibid., p. 11.

> We hear much from the superficial student about the "board being hung up chalked with words, 'This is a wood,' when the action of the play took place in a forest." But this is an impression apparently founded upon Sir Philip Sidney's words in his "Apology of Poetry," written about 1583: "What child is there that, coming to a play and seeing Thebes written in great letters on an old door, doth believe that it is Thebes?" And whether these words were "chalked" upon the outside door of the building admitting to the auditorium, or whether they appeared exhibited to the eye of the audience on the stage-door of the tiring room is not made clear, but this is certain, that there is no direct evidence yet forthcoming to prove that boards were ever used in any of Shakespeare's dramas or in those of Ben Jonson; and, with some other dramatists, there is evidence of the name of the play and its locality being shown in writing, either by the prologue, or hung up on one of the posts of the auditorium.[57]

Poel concluded that the Elizabethan stage afforded the actor and director a variety as well as an economy of movement. It created an intimacy between performers and audience not possible in the large Victorian houses of his day. Therefore, Poel advocated a return to the Elizabethan conditions, even concerning such technical aspects as costumes and lighting.

> Poel asserted the supremacy of the unlocalized permanent setting of the Elizabethan stage, the need for speed and continuity of presentation, and a greater respect for the full text. Instead of powerful illumination, he argued for a more diffused and subdued lighting somewhat equivalent to the candle-power light of the olden times. Against painstaking reproductions of the costumes of the various periods suggested by the plays, he upheld the Elizabethan practice of using Elizabethan dress in all save a small minority of roles. Against what he termed redundancy of emphasis and slow delivery of Shakespeare's verse,

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[57]Poel. p. 6.

> he advocated and taught a swift and musically-inflected diction.[58]

It was these aspects of the Elizabethan stage and staging which Poel wished to recreate for modern audiences in the twentieth century. Poel summed up his belief in the platform stage.

> The Platform performance simply means this, that I want to show that there was a possible movement on the Elizabethan stage not possible on the proscenium stage!. . . . For a Shakespearean representation, I am myself content with a balcony, a recess, two doors and the forward platform.[59]

Poel believed that the Elizabethan actor was a highly trained and capable performer. "As the absence of theatrical machinery helped the playwrights to be poets, so the capacity of actors stimulated literary genius to the creation of characters which the authors knew beforehand would be finely and intelligently rendered."[60] The audiences of Shakespeare's time were not uncritical of the actor's art, and it was Poel's opinion that they understood perfectly what a clean action and a good delivery meant. Poel was fond of quoting John Addington Symonds who said,

> Considering how little the Elizabethan drama owed to scenery and mounting, and how wholly it depended for interpretation upon acting, the facts we know about stage-players are not a little astonishing. . . . It is certain that acting reached a very high pitch of excellance in the days of Burbage and Alleyn , Summer and Tarlton. Shakespere (sic) could not have written for

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[58]William A. Armstrong, "The Art of Shakespearean Production in the Twentieth Century," Essays and Studies, 15 (1962), p. 76.

[59]Speaight, p. 58.

[60]Poel, p. 8.

> inferior players those parts which at the present time tax histrionic talent beyond its faculty.[61]

Poel felt that the Elizabethan actor must have possessed a secret of rapid but natural delivery of dialogue. He sought a median between the slavish following of the iambic meter and the fallacy that if you wanted Shakespeare's poetry to sound natural, all you had to do was treat it like prose. Poel's method was much simpler than he sometimes made it appear, and it can be described in two of his own phrases, "exaggerated naturalness," and "tuned tones."[62] By this he meant that just as Shakespeare's characters talked with an "exaggerated naturalness," so should the actor; and by "tuned tones," he meant that any speech which was to carry and have significance must be inflected. Poel felt that the Elizabethans must have spoken with a variety of rhythm and emphasis which was much more characteristic of the best French and Italian actors than English actors of his day. Moreover, it was easy for them to do this without offending the modesty of nature, since no member of the Globe audience was more than about thirty feet from an actor speaking from the front of the platform.

At the time when Poel was beginning his reforms, most actors not only spoke slowly, but gave an effect of slowness. They were accustomed to emphasizing each word. Poel had learned that it was possible to speak slowly and yet give the effect of speed.

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[61]John Addington Symonds, Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama (London: John Murray, 1924), pp. 237, 243.

[62]William Poel, Monthly Letters (London: T. Werner Laurie, Ltd., 1929), pp. 13-22.

> As with all other arts, so it is with good acting, its excellence lies in restraint and in knowing what to surrender. If elocution is to imitate nature, a dozen or more words must be sacrificed so that one word may predominate and thus give the keynote to the tune of the whole sentence. In this way only can the sound be made to echo the sense. But the last thing, apparently, the actor cares to do is to give up making every word tell. Redundancy of emphasis is his besetting sin, especially in the speaking of verse. Thus Shakespeare, without elaborate scenic accessories, is unattractive on our stage, because our actors rarely bring intelligence to what they are saying. . . . Of course to speak rapidly on the stage and clearly at the same time requires not only a flexible voice but severe training in exercises. . . . Compared to the French or the Germans, the English are bad listeners when they get inside a theatre.[63]

It was Poel's theory that Shakespeare had left the actor certain clues to the delivery of lines in the First Folio. Poel found that here certain words were printed with a capital letter which, even in Elizabethan days, were not spelled this way. According to Poel, the word with the capital letter is manifestly the key word, and indicates clearly an actor's emphasis. Poel gave great attention to such words, as well as other Elizabethan punctuation.

The key word, then, was the principle of Poel's elocutionary technique. He sought to discover the natural intonation which would give to every sentence the same "tune" that a sentence of identical meaning would have in modern conversation. He also felt that there must be equal regard for the context and meaning of words, and for their rhythmical and poetic value. Shakespeare attached great importance to the sounds of words; he knew how to adapt them to the mood and

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[63]Speaight, p. 63.

action of the scene. Poel felt that it was up to the actor to discover the clues to their delivery. His aim was always a reasonable imitation of nature.

> Poetry may require a greater elevation of style in its elocution than prose, but in either case the fundamental condition is that of representing life, and as George Lewes ably puts it, "all obvious violations of the truths of life are errors in art." In the delivery of verse, therefore, on the stage, the audience should never be made to feel that the tones are unusual. They should still follow the laws of speaking, and not those of singing. But our actors, who excel in modern plays by the truth and force of their presentation of life, when they appear in Shakespeare make use of an elocution that no human being was ever known to indulge in. They employ, besides, a redundancy of emphasis which destroys all meaning of the words and all resemblance to natural speech. It is necessary to bear in mind that, when dramatic dialogue is written in verse, there are more words put into a sentence than are needed to convey the actual thought that is uppermost in the speaker's mind; in order, therefore, to give his delivery an appearance of spontaneity, the actor should arrest the attention of the listener by the accentuation of those words which convey the central idea or thought of the speech he is uttering, and should keep in the background, by means of modulation and deflection of voice, the words with which that thought is ornamented.[64]

Poel states that there has been much discussion concerning the short span of time, two hours and a half, in which an Elizabethan play was acted, but he expressed no doubt that the entire dialogue of a script, which often exceeds two thousand lines, was spoken on the stage. He explains that none of the dramatists wrote with a view to publication, and few of the plays were printed from the author's manuscript. This fact, he concludes, points to the employment of a skilled and rapid delivery on the part of the actor.

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[64]Poel, pp. 57-58.

> Artists of the French school, whose voices are highly trained and capable of a varied and subtle modulation, will run through a speech of fifty lines with the utmost ease and rapidity; and there is good reason to suppose that the blank verse of the Elizabethan dramatists was spoken "trippingly on the tongue.". . . So with an efficient elocution and no "waits," old Elizabethan actors would have got through one-half of a play before our modern actors could cover a third.[65]

In conclusion, Poel states that the interdependence of Shakespeare's dramatic art with the form of theatre for which he wrote is seldom emphasized. He also states that a few scholars have recognized that a joint study of Shakespeare and the stage for which he wrote is possible, but according to Poel, they have not pursued their research either seriously or impartially and their conclusions have proved disappointing. "They have read the plays in modern printed editions, they have seen them acted on the picture stage, they have heard allusions made to old tapestry, rushes, and boards, and at once they have concluded that the dramatist found his theatre inadequate to his needs."[66] Poel believed that the more the conditions of the Elizabethan theatre are incorporated into our theatres, the more successful our perceptions will be of Shakespeare's drama. "If a theatre were established in this country for the performance of Shakespeare's plays with the simplicity and rapidity with which they were acted in his time, it might limit the endless experiments, mutilations, and profitless discussions that every revival occasions."[67]

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[65]Poel. p. 17.

[66]Ibid., p. 4.

[67]Ibid., p. 18.

A study of the Elizabethan staging techniques of Baker and Poel would not be complete without a comparison of their actual staging practices. It must be remembered, however, that what both men held in theory, they were often unable to demonstrate in practice. They were restricted by a number of factors, for example, inadequate facilities, a slavish adherence to tradition, and the lack of public support. Because his ventures were sponsored by the Elizabethan Stage Society, or sometimes independently produced, Poel was able to stage more revivals the Baker, who was bound by the university. However, the staging of both men was significant enough to provide a basis for comparison. Chapter IV examines the actual staging practices of both Baker and Poel.

Chapter IV

THE ELIZABETHAN STAGING PRACTICES OF BAKER AND POEL

Baker's Elizabethan Staging

In spite of his knowledge of the Elizabethan stage and his keen interest in the actual production process, George Pierce Baker's opportunities for staging plays were relatively few. This was due in part to the attitude held by Harvard University, and indeed most institutions of learning in the late nineteenth century. The study of theatre was not part of the university curriculum, and the work of the Elizabethan dramatists was a topic for discussion only in classes of English Literature. However, the burgeoning popularity of theatre in the United States, especially among young people, made it an important part of their extracurricular entertainment. It is to the credit of men such as Baker, and his emphasis upon the practical aspects of theatre, that universities now stage plays as well as study them.

Harvard attitudes toward the theatre during his years as a student were an important influence upon Baker. Student theatricals and musical activities were almost as old as the college itself. However, their increasing number had required the completion in 1876 of Sanders Theatre in the Harvard memorial hall already erected to commemorate her Civil War dead.

In that year of centennial celebrations, the production of a Greek play seemed an appropriate way to dedicate Harvard's new theatre. However, this plan did not mature until March of 1881 when it was announced that a performance in Sanders of the Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles would be performed in the original Greek. It was during this year, 1881, when Sanders became a classic amphitheatre and actors pronounced their lines in Greek, that a similar experiment with Shakespeare's Hamlet was being performed in London by William Poel.

Baker's initial involvement with Elizabethan staging occurred while yet a student at Harvard. Projects of this kind were often a result of his own initiative.

> Saturday, August 23, 1884. In the afternoon decided to get up a pantomine for the evening. By dint of begging from the Crowninshields got a copy of "The Brave Alonzo and the Fair Imogene." We rushed things and it went off very well indeed. Miss Jenkins was Imogene; Sullivan, the Baron - I, Alonzo.[1]

Also in 1884, Baker took part in a production of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar on the bare stage of Sanders Theatre. Baker took an active interest in theatre projects throughout his student career, however, the next serious impetus for an Elizabethan revival did not come for several years.

Ever since his days as editor of the Harvard Monthly, Baker had remained interested in its affairs. Thus there was probably little surprise in December of 1894 at one of the

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[1]Wisner Payne Kinne, George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 19.

magazine's editorials on a theme with which G.P.B. was already identified. The editorial said, with a reference to Baker's class in the history of English drama, that it might be as desirable to revive the character of the Elizabethan stage in some play of this "more modern period" as it was to present the character of the classic stage in the current revival of Terence's Phormio at Harvard's Sanders Theatre. The article further stated that it might even be of philological interest to see how nearly the Harvard students could reproduce the Elizabethan pronunciation.[2]

In 1895, when Baker was the only member of the Harvard English Department then teaching the plays of Ben Jonson, he learned that students at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York were soon to give the first revival in over a century of Jonson's Epicoene, or the Silent Woman, and were willing to perform at Harvard. Quickly accepting the opportunity, the English Department appointed Baker, and Professors Child and Kittredge to take charge of the Cambridge production. It was decided to stage as authentic an Elizabethan theatre experience as was possible within the confines of Sanders. This project meant considerable alteration to the existing building. Baker wrote of the purposes of this committee and their expectations:

> The committee at once took as its aim, as far as possible, to turn Sanders Theatre, on the twentieth of March (1895), into a theatre of 1609-10, the date of the first performance of "The Silent Woman." This

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[2]Harvard Monthly, editorial, Vol. XIX, no. 3 (December 1894), pp. 128-30.

> aim subdivided into three tasks: to make the stage of Sanders Theatre into a strictly Elizabethan stage; to arrange such changes in the text as modern taste might require, and train the actors to give the comedy to the best advantage; and to drill Harvard students to represent an Elizabethan audience.[3]

In carrying out the first of these tasks, Baker and the committee members appear to have been unaware that two years before, in 1893, William Poel had converted the Royalty Theatre in London into a similar imitation of the Fortune Playhouse for a performance of Measure for Measure.[4] The projects were similar in more respects than one. The stage of the London experiment was Elizabethan only so far as it was architecturally possible, and Victorian propriety also necessitated considerable cuts in the text. The Harvard committee, however, was under the impression that they were doing something for the first time. They consulted with a New York architect, but depended chiefly upon the DeWitt drawing of the Swan Theatre which had been published in 1888, and upon William Henslowe's contract specifications for the Fortune Theatre. Because of the nature of Sanders Theatre, a combination of some features of both public and private Elizabethan theatres was unavoidable. Nevertheless, the reconstruction did provide for a raised platform stage, an inner below with two side entrances, an upper gallery, and a pit for the "groundlings." In his book, George Pierce Baker

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[3]George Pierce Baker, "The Revival of Ben Jonson's Epicoene; Or, the Silent Woman, March 20, 1895," Harvard Graduates' Magazine, III (June 1895), 493.

[4]Robert Speaight, William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), pp. 90-101.

and the American Theatre, Mr. Wisner Payne Kinne states that this appears to have been "the first authentic Elizabethan platform stage in America,"[5] and its construction was due in large part to the inspiration and efforts of George Pierce Baker. This was certainly one of the first departures away from the proscenium arch and the illusionistic properties which had held sway over nineteenth century drama. Although it may not have been, as Mr. Kinne suggests, "the most revolutionary technical event in the history of the American theatre,"[6] its introduction was certainly significant enough to influence the staging of numerous Elizabethan revivals.

After the production, Baker gave the following account of its success. His comments provide insight as to his own motivations in staging Elizabethan drama.

> In the first place, students of the drama in general and the Elizabethan drama in particular have had a chance to contrast, under proper conditions, the widely divergent methods of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. They have had an opportunity to study the classicist under the conditions for which he wrote, - that is, on the stage; to realize his remarkable power of visualization, his development of his characters bit by bit into finished pictures, and his careful fitting of his work to the conditions of its presentation. This last was noticeable in two ways. First, those who saw the play given with women in the cast and with men only agreed that it was much more amusing and successful when men only, as in Jonson's time, filled the parts. Secondly, many spoke of the fitness of the play to the conditions of its production, and doubted whether, with different surroundings, it would be so good. In New York, on a stage not very different from the modern, it was by no means the success it was in Cambridge on the Elizabethan stage. . . . In an

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[5]Kinne, p. 59.

[6]Ibid.

> Elizabethan comedy the character-drawing or the situation filled the hearer's mind. A few hints as to the scene made him supply the rest. . . . Were our minds not so sterile from the present abuse of scenery, our imaginations would respond as readily.[7]

It is clear from this account that Baker saw the revival as an experiment and a learning tool. His main concern is for his students. He wished to use this production as an example; to reveal the advantages of an Elizabethan performance: the simplicity of its setting and the focus upon the text. Baker's remarks also reveal a concern for the short-comings of the modern theatre, its "abuse of scenery" and more important, its stifling effect on creative imagination.

Baker also viewed the production as providing an opportunity to test ideas about the Elizabethan public theatre. One area of investigation concerned the use of curtains and backdrops. Baker summarized the committee's conclusion. "They do not believe in curtains before 1616, for they could not have been possible on a stage like that of the Swan. How the scenes and acts were indicated, what the backing of the balcony was, just where the fops and pages sat, - all these are clearer."[8] It is important to note that in his 1904 production of Hamlet, Baker's upper stage, the "inner above" of Elizabethans, was backed with a painted cloth and practical for staging.[9]

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[7]Baker, "The Revival of Ben Jonson's Epicoene," pp. 500-501.

[8]Ibid., p. 501.

[9]George Pierce Baker, "Hamlet on an Elizabethan Stage," Shakespeare Jahrbuch, Vol. XLI, 1905, p. 299.

Commenting on the production of Epicoene, or the Silent Woman several years later, Baker was able to draw further conclusions concerning the effect which the stage structure had upon the relationship between actor and audience.

> . . . when Ben Jonson's Silent Woman was revived at Harvard University, the professional actors, when they saw the wide expanse of undecorated stage and the eager pittites sitting close up to the very edge of it, almost refused to carry on their work. They said: "These people are too close; we have nothing to set our imaginations afire. All this will chill us inevitably into tameness." But at the end of the first act, to which they had been forced, they came off tingling with enthusiasm and delight because, as one of them said: "Why, I have never known anything like this. There are no footlights to get over, there is no proscenium arch to frame us in. As quick as I do anything the audience comes back at me with a response. Those old fellows certainly knew the right conditions for the actor." A slight tendency in the last few years to produce plays less elaborately, to let the play depend more on its text and the actors who interpret it, is but a return to that stage which gave us the best drama that we have ever had and which affected advantageously the work of Shakespeare himself.[10]

The staging of this Elizabethan play was significant for several reasons. It was an important step in the development of Baker's ideas; he was able to test his theories and provide results by practical application. Here, for the first time, he became involved in the experimental use of a theatre for the testing of dramatic ideas. This may have been the beginning of his own laboratory use of the 47 Workshop stage. In any case, the experiment had far-reaching consequences.

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[10]Baker, The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, p. 308.

Interest in the production was more than local. A few years later, when William Archer was in New York to deliver a lecture on an American national theatre, he heard about the Harvard revival and asked Baker for photographs of the reconstructed Elizabethan stage. These pictures were taken to England, along with a copy of Baker's account of the experiment. There is no evidence to prove their direct influence, however in his book on Baker, Mr. Kinne suggests their possible influence on the work of Poel and the Elizabethan Stage Society.[11] In any case, the Elizabethan revival at Harvard in 1895 received considerable attention.

In 1896, the year following The Silent Woman, the Delta Upsilon fraternity began a series of Elizabethan revivals which continued as an annual affair until the first World War. Although Baker had no official function in these fraternity revivals, he was largely responsible for their instigation, and was frequently consulted in matters related to their production, both in questions of text and staging. In 1910, when James Bryant Conant was a member of the Delta Upsilon cast for The Merry Devil of Edmonton, Baker received a letter of gratitude for his "advice and aid" and his "estimable criticism."[12]

One of the most successful of the Delta Upsilon revivals was a production of Heywood and Rowley's Fortune by Land and Sea, performed at the Bijou Theatre in Boston, March 25, 1899.

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[11]Kinne, p. 60.

[12]Wisner Payne Kinne, "George Pierce Baker: Scholar, Teacher, Dramatist," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1952), p. 207. f.

Prior to its opening, Baker gave a special lecture in Sever Hall on the play, its authors, and the evolution of the Elizabethan playhouse.[13] It was at this time that a similar lecture was being given by William Poel on the evolutionary process of "English Playhouses in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" at the Royal Institute of Great Britain.[14]

During the years following the production of Jonson's Epicoene, the Department of English appeared to forget its original success in the field of Elizabethan revivals. The Delta Upsilon fraternity continued its annual productions, however, and the idea for another such experiment remained fresh in Baker's mind. During this period too, he was strengthening his knowledge of the subject with lectures to schools and colleges on "London and its Theatres in Shakespeare's Time." These lectures, which were extensions of his Harvard courses, were illustrated with over forty rare slides of maps, buildings, and playhouses. In a description of his lecture on Shakespeare's theatre, Baker explained his intentions: "I aim to make very clear just the conditions under which Shakespeare produced his plays and to what extent the plays were affected by the conditions."[15] These statements suggest a strong interest in the production aspects of the plays, and a performance-oriented

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[13]"Professor Baker Lectures on the Play to be Performed by the Delta Upsilon Society," Boston Evening Transcript, 17 March 1899, p. 9.

[14]Kinne, "George Pierce Baker: Scholar, Teacher, Dramatist," p. 203. f.

[15]Kinne, George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre, p. 61.

point of view. The outlines for his basic ideas concerning these conditions were first drawn as early as 1896 for his Radcliffe course, and were eventually published in 1907 as The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist. In keeping with his theatrical approach to literature, Baker introduced his lecture by referring to Shakespeare as "the greatest technician I know."[16]

In response to his lectures on Elizabethan staging, Baker received letters from other institutions of higher learning. A letter from the English Department at Stanford University in 1902 requested information concerning points raised by Harvard's Elizabethan stage. More specifically, they wished for information on the staging of The Knight of the Burning Pestle by Francis Beaumont with practical historical accuracy. In 1903 Brander Matthews of Columbia wrote Baker concerning an article in Modern Philology on the influence of Elizabethan theatre upon the structure of Shakespeare's plays. Among other professional literary critics, there was a similar curiosity to understand the historical basis of dramatic technique.

While in England in 1901-02, Baker became acquainted with the work of the Elizabethan Stage Society through William Poel's production of Henry V at the University of London.[17] Possibly he saw Poel's production of Everyman at this time. After seeing Adolph Linnebach's production of the play in 1912, Baker

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[16]Kinne, p. 62.

[17]Ibid., p. 63.

commented, "Compared with Poel's Everyman this lost vigor and universality and power of the original. . . . Moral: when you revive a play great in its day, trust it and try to give it as nearly as possible as it was given."[18] We have no evidence as to what extent the Elizabethan Stage Society influenced Baker. However, not long after his visit to London, Baker was afforded another opportunity to test his ideas on Elizabethan staging.

In 1903, Baker wrote to the English actor Johnston Forbes Robertson and asked if he would consider playing Hamlet at Harvard on his American tour, explaining his plan to produce the play on an Elizabethan stage in Sanders Theatre. The actor replied that Baker's proposal was flattering, and after rearranging his schedule, accepted the invitation. During the next meeting of Harvard's English Department, Baker proposed that the old Elizabethan set be rebuilt to conform with the best information then available about Elizabethan theatre architecture. He called for professional advice from Professor H. Langford Warren, Chairman of the Department of Architecture. Warren examined the contracts for the building of the Fortune and Hope theatres and investigated recent studies of the Elizabethan stage before rebuilding the old set. The result was as near an approximation of Shakespeare's stage as information in 1904 permitted.

This experiment in Elizabethan staging had wide-spread impact. The event was not merely academic, for it became

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[18]Kinne, p. 176.

well-known among theatre professionals. John Drew, one of America's leading actors, sent a letter to Baker on the second of April, expressing his keen interest in the project. The actor regretted that he was unable to attend, but requested a detailed account of the production. Baker's account was published in the Shakespeare Jahrbuch in 1905.

This Elizabethan staging of Hamlet, according to Baker, was intended to throw light on "mooted questions,"[19] and he regarded it as distinctly another experiment. In this spirit, Baker examined the texts of some two hundred Elizabethan plays to answer questions twentieth century actors might ask as they trod a sixteenth century stage. The production dealt with such issues as the practicality of staging within the three areas called for in most Elizabethan plays: upper, inner, and front stages; the disposition of curtains, the number of entrance-ways, the use of signs, the focus of attention, and the continuity of action.

One of the most important results of the experiment, according to Baker, was the freedom it afforded from the trammels of the proscenium stage and the stifling enclosure of the box set, at the same time that it achieved the dramatic values of those very devices.

> This revival shows, too, what all such revivals have shown, that the old comedies and tragedies gain when freed from modern setting. Everything on the Elizabethan staged centered attention on the actor as the exponent of the dramatist's ideas: it focused where we dissipate; it subordinated everything to

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[19]George Pierce Baker, "Hamlet on an Elizabethan Stage," Shakespeare Jahrbuch, XLI (1905), p. 296.

> the play itself; too often we call attention first to the setting, second to the actor - and let the play take care of itself.[20]

The importance of this revival was clear in the interest generated, and on May 5, 1904, Harvard's English Department sent the following letter to Professor Baker:

> In accordance with the unanimous vote of the Department of English at its meeting yesterday afternoon, I take pleasure in informing you that the Department offers you heartiest thanks for the energy, the learning, and the skill with which you arranged the performances of Hamlet by Johnston Forbes Robertson, under conditions which more nearly revived those of the Elizabethan theatre than has been the case before or elsewhere.[21]

As the 1905 academic year began, Baker received a letter from William Poel. Sidney Lee had suggested to Poel that he write Baker about an American visit to promote an English project to build an Elizabethan playhouse after a model of the Globe Theatre. This, Poel explained, was a matter of some difficulty in England, where he found the public and theatrical profession against the idea. Also upon Lee's advice, Poel communicated with Baker's colleague, William J. Rolfe, who in turn informed Baker on the twenty-ninth of September:

> I have written to him that Harvard is the place, and that you are the man, to introduce his project in this country. I have referred to your work in bringing out old English plays here, and to your excellent lectures on the Elizabethan stage.[22]

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[20]Baker, p. 301.

[21]Letter to George P. Baker from the Harvard Department of English, Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[22]Kinne, p. 66.

George Pierce Baker's concerns were very similar to those of Poel. He wished to raise the theatre-consciousness of the public, not only in the area of Elizabethan revivals, but in helping to provide for this country, a native American drama. He continued in these efforts throughout his teaching career; and although his personal involvements were few, he followed with growing interest, projects in Elizabethan staging. His accomplishments in the field had already assured their future success. Baker summed up the significance of the 1904 production.

> First, Hamlet had never previously, in America, been given before a purely Academic audience. Secondly, it had never been given on a reproduction of the Elizabethan stage. Consequently, in the third place, the performances threw much light on recently much mooted questions as to the characteristics of that stage. Finally, it was the first time that an American college or university had invited an English-speaking actor to appear before it not as a lecturer but as an actor.[23]

It is evident that Baker's staging of Elizabethan plays was clearly associated with his academic ties. He was motivated by his belief that the only way to study the plays properly was to stage them, and he sought as an objective, the instigation of a theatre curriculum within the university. In many ways, Baker's approach to Elizabethan staging was that of the scholar, an academic concern for testing ideas. However, his emphasis upon the production as staged indicates an interest beyond the academic. Baker sought a collaboration between theatre and scholarship, and his production of Hamlet in 1904, discussed in more detail in Chapter V, further illustrates the point.

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[23]Baker, p. 296.

Poel's Elizabethan Staging

William Poel devoted his life to the staging of Elizabethan plays. In a career which spanned over fifty years, he was associated with the production of over one hundred plays, fifty of which involved the actual staging of an Elizabethan revival. It would be virtually impossible to discuss in detail all of Poel's revivals. The scope of this dissertation demands that some of them be omitted. However, I shall discuss those which are most significant by the relevance of their originality in the nineteenth century or their impact upon both scholarly research and public opinion.

Poel's work can be roughly divided into four periods: recitals performed in conjunction with the Shakespeare Reading Society (1887-1894), productions sponsored by the Elizabethan Stage Society (1895-1905), productions sponsored independently (1906-1026), and those produced for the Elizabethan Stage Circle (1927-1932). The major portion of Poel's actual staging of Elizabethan plays occurred during his association with the Elizabethan Stage Society. However, there were several earlier attempts which proved important in the evolution of these revivals.

Poel's accomplishments in reformation actually began in 1881 with the unheralded production of the First Quarto Hamlet performed in St. George's Hall, London. He offered to mount an amateur performance of this long lost Quarto to prove its effectiveness for the stage. The focus, therefore, in this first revival was upon text, and not the historical accuracy

of the staging. It was Poel's belief that the editor of the First Quarto had "endeavored to reproduce the play as he saw it represented," possibly as it was arranged for playing on tour. Poel went further and argued that the First Quarto "represents more truly Shakespeare's dramatic conception than either Quarto 2 or our stage version."[24] In addition to clinging to the First Quarto text, Poel had many settled ideas about the character of Hamlet. He was not the sentimental figure of gloom whose very jokes were delivered with tragic solemnity, but he was to seem a smiling Elizabethan gallant in his thirties pursuing Gertrude as if she were an elderly Queen Elizabeth. Polonius was not the crafty old fox of a chief minister, but "the essence of genteel foppishness, ceaselessly chattering."[25] In the nunnery scene, Hamlet should see the King and Polonius concealing themselves behind the arras, thus avoiding the necessity for having the curtain shake and bulge, and he should not rail at Ophelia when she returns his gifts. In the closet scene, Hamlet should not be tender with the Queen, but as fiercely satirical as the lines demand. In the mad scene, Ophelia should carry a lute instead of wild flowers, since Poel believed that the Queen would not later have described them if we had already seen them. And of course the play must not end with the death of Hamlet, but with the appearance of Fortinbras who arrives in order to restore order to the kingdom, "a symbol

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[24]Letter dated 20 April in the Era, (London), 23 April 1881, p. 4.

[25]Speaight, p. 52.

of political virginity," as Poel saw it, "life in the midst of death."[26]

As if these innovations were not alarming enough in the eyes of Poel's contemporaries, the absence of intervals in the First Quarto denied an actor the opportunity to make a point for applause at the end of each scene, and Poel seized his chance to recover the larger effect of Elizabethan performance in the pace, sweep, and rhythm of continuous action possible on a bare platform.

It must be remembered that the DeWitt drawing of the Swan Theatre was not yet known, and Poel worked with curtains. The Times correspondent devoted his space to the novelty of the text and the staging, reporting that the play was presented "without any of the adventitious adornments of scenery:"

> The stage was enclosed with a pair of red curtains, through an aperture at the back of which, and through other openings at the right and left of the proscenium, the players came and went. . . . Two or three chairs and a small wooden platform, something like that provided by a painter for his model, formed the furniture, the latter being employed in the play scene. . . . The players were dressed, as the playbill informed us, in strict Elizabethan costume. . .[27]

The writer found the performance "a curious addition to the stock of public amusements," and his sarcasm was typical of those who came to scoff. The players were accused of playing for their own gratification, and that of their friends. It is

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[26]Speaight, p. 52.

[27]"Mr. Furnivall's Hamlet," Times (London), 21 April 1881, p. 8.

interesting to note that Poel, who was playing Hamlet, was considered "lachrymose" and "ever in a hurry,"[28] and accused of running his lines together, a criticism which would be heard a generation later when Granville-Barker continued Poel's traditions of delivering Shakespeare.

Dutton Cook, whose criticism of the production centered mainly on the text, did mention the "weakness of the interpretation ventured by the amateurs,"[29] and commented further on audience reaction.

> The attitude of the general audience was one of apathy tinctured by a disposition to deride. . . considerable stir attending the entry upon the stage of Fortenbrasse, a character usually omitted from ordinary acting editions of the tragedy. But to many the performance was very wearisome and depressing; while a strong feeling prevailed that, upon the whole, the experiment was of an absurd and reprehensible sort, involving, as it did necessarily, some degradation of the poet in whose honour it purported to be undertaken.[30]

The amateur actors may not have executed the play exactly as Poel envisioned it, but the indifference to the historical interest of the occasion reveals the size of the task Poel had undertaken. In light of what we now know, the performance was a turning point. As Robert Speaight has commented, "The experiment in St. George's Hall was historical in the sense that is was seminal:"

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[28]"Mr. Furnivall's Hamlet," Times (London), 21 April 1881, p. 8.

[29]Dutton Cook, Nights at the Play, A View of the English Stage (London: Chatto and Windus, 1883), II, p. 315.

[30]Ibid., pp. 315-316.

> There is nothing new today in Hamlet being performed in curtains; there is nothing sensational in the appearance of Fortinbras. No one will raise an eyebrow if you suggest that Hamlet is a play drenched in Renaissance thought, or that while Hamlet should never behave like an actor, there is every reason why he should, on occasion, behave like a cad. The romantic Hamlet is now the reactionary Hamlet, and the sentimental Hamlet is obsolete. Those changes might never have come about if William Poel had not had the startlingly original idea of reading the play as if he had just borrowed the prompter's copy from the Globe Theatre. He was on the side of logic against prejudice, of common sense against theatrical conventions.[31]

Poel was an instructor to the Shakespeare Reading Society from 1887-1897, and it was during this period that the next important step in Elizabethan staging took place. In 1893, after studying the Fortune Theatre contract, Poel attempted to build the old playhouse inside the Royalty Theatre for an Elizabethan Measure for Measure. The following announcement appeared in the Times.

> In order to test the dramatic effect of acting an Elizabethan play under the conditions it was written to fulfill, the Shakespeare Reading Society, of which Mr. Irving is president, will on November 9, 10, and 11, at Westend Theatre, give a performance of Measure for Measure on a stage of the Sixteenth Century style, with a group of spectators in appropriate costume.[32]

This was the biggest step to date in seeking the non-illusory experience. There were four performances in all, on a curtained stage, 30 feet wide by 24 feet deep, without scenery, flanked by Elizabethan gentlemen who sat on the stage and in side boxes. These spectators conspicuously puffed at clay pipes during the single intermission.

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[31] Speaight, p. 57.

[32] Times (London), 8 November 1893, p. 8.

> What the members of the Shakespeare Reading Society have done is to erect a small proscenium within that of the Royalty, and in the background to raise the balcony or second stage above referred to, with two trans verse curtains, the drawing of one or other of which marks a change of scene.[33]

The Times printed a lengthy review, complaining the effect was anachonistic; illumination was by gaslight with a row of footlights, women played the female parts instead of boys, an no placards named the place of action. In fact, as Norman Marshall points out, the general public was not only confused but disconcerted by Poel's work. "I have been told by those who saw Poel's early productions that at first the lack of scenery was far more distracting than the over-abundance of it at His Majesty's."[34] Measure for Measure was also attacked by William Archer whose complaints were more technical. He stated that the curtain was too far forward and no doors provided entrances.[35] C. E. Montague did not get the Elizabethan sensation of "having an actor come forward to the edge of the platform in the midst of ourselves."[36] Poel was still hampered by the existing proscenium arch, an obstacle he had to deal with throughout most of his career. The Times critic also was disappointed in the performance, but his comments are revealing.

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[33]Times (London), 11 November 1893, p. 4.

[34]Norman Marshall, The Producer and the Play (London: Macdonald, 1957), p. 171.

[35]J. L. Styan, The Shakespeare Revolution (Cambridge: University Press, 1977), p. 57.

[36]C. E. Montague, Dramatic Values (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1911), p. 244.

> Usually it is assumed that in such circumstances the imagination of the onlooker would be so stimulated as to conjure up streets and palaces. . . . The present writer must confess that he had no such experience. In fact, though following the action closely, he had no picture of the scene before his mind at all. He found himself interested in the persons of the play, without considering whether they were English or foreign, ancient or modern.[37]

There are several compliments to Poel in this criticism, for he continually stressed that focus should be on the action and characters of the play. In most instances, Poel's characters, no matter what their nationality, were Elizabethan at heart. "Poel would always have the answer that at the Globe, Julius Caesar was in fact played in Elizabethan costume with minor classical accessories. Lines such as 'pluck'd me ope his doublet,' or 'half their faces buried in their cloaks,' were evidence of this."[38] The Times' reviewer evidently expected that a bare stage would require him to exercise his visual imagination and build his own scenery; instead, it was the unlocalized and timeless action which became prominent.

In spite of unfavorable comments from most critics, Poel was gaining supporters. George Bernard Shaw, an apostle of the new drama, became an admirer of Poel's work and later said,

> The more I see of these performances by the Elizabethan Stage Society, the more I am convinced that their method of presenting an Elizabethan play is not only the right method for that particular sort of play, but that any play performed on a platform amidst the audience get closer home to its

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[37] Times (London), 11 November 1893, p. 4.

[38] Speaight, p. 104.

> hearers than when it is presented as a picture framed by a proscenium.[39]

Between 1895 and 1905, Poel produced twenty-nine plays for the Elizabethan Stage Society. The first was Twelfth Night, given in Burlington Hall, Savile Row, and in St. George's Hall in June of 1895. It was three months earlier, in March of that year, that George Pierce Baker was mounting his first full-scale Elizabethan production of The Silent Woman. For Poel's Twelfth Night, a valuable wardrobe of Elizabethan costumes was purchased, and stage pieces from Measure for Measure were used. William Archer, the most formidable critic of Poel's work, commented that Twelfth Night, which was described in the program as "acted after the manner of the Sixteenth Century," was in fact "staged (more or less) after the manner of the sixteenth century and acted after the manner of the Nineteenth Century Amateur."[40] A repeat performance was planned in December 1895 for the hall of Gray's Inn, but The Comedy of Errors was substituted. The whole evening was designed to recall the first performance of The Comedy of Errors as an after-supper interlude in the same hall in December 1594. Although most critics again scoffed, it was Shaw who came to the rescue, describing it as "a delightful, as distinguished from a commercially promising first night. . . . I have never, I hope, underrated the importance of the amateur; but I am now

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[39]George Bernard Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties (London: Constable and Co., 1932), II, p. 184.

[40]Speaight, p. 103.

beginning to cling to him as the saviour of theatrical art."[41]

One of the most important early productions of the Elizabethan Stage Society was the Twelfth Night produced in 1897 before the Prince of Wales and a distinguished audience. Poel chose to play it in the Hall of the Middle Temple, the location of its first performance on February 2, 1601, before Queen Elizabeth.[42] At the upper end of the hall Poel set up a stage consisting of a raised platform with a balcony above it, and arranged for upstage entrances on either side in the manner of the DeWitt drawing. He again used a traverse, before which exterior scenes could be played. The only furnishing was a table and a chair, and costumes were those of the Elizabethan court. Except that electric light was used instead of candles, and lady members of the Society played women's roles, the staging struck a note of authenticity. The play was performed within two hours.[43]

Discussions of this production again turned chiefly to the effect of staging without scenery, and Poel's production of The Tempest in November of that year prompted similar debate. Shaw recognized that the nature of theatrical illusion was at issue.

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[41]Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties, I, p. 269.

[42]John Manningham, The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602-1603 (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1976), p. 48.

[43]Styan, p. 60.

> Mr. Poel says frankly, "See that singers' gallery up there! Well, let's pretend that it's the ship." We agree; and the thing is done. . . . The singing gallery makes no attempt to impose on us: it disarms criticism by unaffected submission to the facts of the case, and throws itself honestly on our fancy, with instant success.[44]

On February 21, 1900, Poel and his brave amateurs again put on the First Quarto Hamlet, with additions from the Folio, for a single performance in the Carpenters' Hall, London. This time the production was more Elizabethan than ever, with female roles played by boys and men. Although Poel made certain revisions and additions which he considered an improvement over the 1881 revival, the jocular reviews indicate that the experiment was taken no more seriously than before.

Poel was not discouraged, however, in his search for Shakespearean immediacy. After this February performance, one of the first productions of Hamlet in the twentieth century, Poel continued directing revivals sometimes at the rate of four or five a year, for another thirty years. He practiced, as well as preached, Elizabethan reform.

It is indeed ironic that one of Poel's most successful revivals was not an Elizabethan play, but the Medieval Everyman. It attracted large audiences and was the only Poel production to make money. He received one thousand pounds in royalties from America and sold the American rights for five hundred pounds. In autumn 1903, Ben Greet and Charles Frohman sent it out on two extensive tours of the eastern and western states. It is clear, however, that Poel's ambitions did not include

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[44]Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties, III, p. 242.

fame and fortune, for he soon returned to staging Elizabethan revivals.

In 1901 he produced Henry V at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and at the Lecture Theatre, Burlington Gardens. In 1904, at the invitation of the London School Board, Poel gave performances of Much Ado About Nothing for the School Board's Evening Continuation Program. This production toured and gave more performances than any other Poel revival, with the exception of Everyman. During this tour for the educational system, another revival of Shakespeare invaded the schools; Baker was at this time mounting his Harvard production of Hamlet with Forbes Robertson. At the Royalty Theatre in May 1905, Poel produced Romeo and Juliet, the last production of the Elizabethan Stage Society as an organized body. Poel now took sole responsibility for mounting his productions.

Poel became involved with other projects related to Elizabethan reform, and in particular, a movement to construct an Elizabethan playhouse in London. In September of 1905, Poel wrote to George Pierce Baker.

> Mr. Sidney Lee has suggested my writing to you. I hope to visit America for a holiday (sic) arriving in the first week of November and I am anxious while there to arouse interest in the efforts we are making to build an Elizabethan Playhouse after the model of the Old Globe, a matter of some difficulty over here with an apathetic public and the theatrical profession against us.[45]

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[45]William Poel's letter to George Pierce Baker, The Elizabethan Stage Trust, 5 Amersham Road, Putney, London, 8 September 1905; Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Poel was obviously acquainted with the Harvard revivals and sought support in a common endeavor. Perhaps he also wished to compare notes. Baker provided introductions for Poel which served him during subsequent visits to America.

Poel's staging of The Two Gentlemen of Verona in 1910 was one of the most significant contributions to Elizabethan reform. Herbert Beerbohm Tree invited Poel to present the play during Tree's annual Shakespeare Festival at His Majesty's Theatre. According to Robert Speaight, this was like asking the wolf to step into the sheep-fold,[46] for Tree's way with Shakespeare was the popular illustration of everything Poel condemned. But Poel was in no mood for compromise when he led his half-trained troupe of semi-amateurs within that sumptuous, proscenium theatre. For the first time an apron was built out over the orchestra pit of His Majesty's, and front lighting installed in the balconies. Beerbohm Tree may have smiled at Poel's Elizabethan way, but it is significant that the apron and front lighting were later used for Tree's own production of Henry VIII.[47]

Poel's Two Gentlemen provoked a discussion of appropriate illusion even in the London Times. "Of course what they cannot reproduce is the Elizabethan audience with the Elizabethan frame of mind," the correspondent observed, but "the puerile complications and improbabilities of intrigue, which a realistic

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[46]Speaight, p. 121.

[47]Ibid.

modern setting would only have made more glaring, became of little account,"[48] and the characters and plot were thrust into prominence by Poel's presentation. Commenting on the Society's principle of Elizabethan staging, the reviewer also remarked that "it is good to see the principle now and then carried out, for it certainly helps us to a better knowledge of Shakespeare."[49]

It is clear from these reviews that even before the new orientation of Shakespeare created by Granville-Barker, Poel's Elizabethanism was no mere archaeological affectation, but of historical importance and answering a public demand. Martin Harvey presented The Taming of the Shrew at the Prince of Wales Theatre in 1913 listing Poel as coadjutor. The reviews for this production, which adopted most of Poel's staging methods, were extremely favorable.

> The conventions of this method of production are at least no harder to swallow than the conventions of the realistic method; and since it makes no pretence that anything but a play is toward, we are auditors not merely unhindered but positively helped by obvious indications that a play it is.[50]

In terms of the conversion which took place in the course of reviews by the London Times, Poel's experiments can hardly be accounted a failure.

In April 1916, Poel produced Ben Jonson's The Poetaster at the Apothecaries' Hall. The principal characters of the satire, though ostensibly Roman, were all relevant to the London

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[48] Times (London), 21 April 1910, p. 12.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 12 May 1913, p. 8.

of 1600. Shakespeare and other playwrights of his day could be detected beneath the Roman characterizations. The costuming varied from Elizabethan to Carolean, with an occasional classical touch. Poel restaged this play at Carnegie Tech and the University of Detroit during his visit to the United States later in the year.

Of all Elizabethan curiosities, Fratricide Punished, a take-off on Hamlet, is one of the most amusing. Poel knew the play would please by its reminiscence of a masterpiece, but he may have been surprised by its popularity. It was given for two performances at the Playhouse, Oxford in August 1924, and a few months later at the New Oxford and Little Theatres in London. It was revived again in April 1926. Poel's humorous directorial touches, whether intentional or not, contributed to the play's success.

> He did many things in all seriousness which were received with laughter by the audience. The Queen was made to put her wig and false teeth through the bed curtains where they remained to give point to Hamlet's lines about "God has given you one face and you make yourself another.". . . . Ophelia, when mad, was played as Columbine (dressed in a Victorian ballet skirt at first, until someone devised a less definite attire), the character corresponding to Osric as Harlequin, and another small part (not Polonius) as Pantaloon. All three were acted by young ladies in their teens from an academy of stage dancing. Poel spent a lot of time in coaching the girl who played Harlequin how to give the exact intonation to the line "Here is the warm beer". . . going up the scale on the first four words, with a drop of several semi-tones on the word "beer."[51]

Even in this farce, Poel was adamant about clinging to authenticity. The play evidently originated when English companies

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[51]Speaight, pp. 243-244.

travelled in Germany at the end of the sixteenth century. Only when he learned that women actors, as a matter of historical fact, had been on the continent in Shakespeare's day, did Poel permit Hamlet's line to the first player to read, "Have you still all three women with you?"[52] Fratricide Punished won immediate success, and hardened critics, used to sitting rigid and unsmiling, found it hilarious.[53]

Following his formation in 1927 of the Elizabethan Stage Circle, a reorganization of the Stage Society, Poel produced seven more productions, four on a full-size Elizabethan platform stage. The first was Samuel Rowley's When You See Me, You Know Me; and in The Saturday Review, Ivor Brown described the effect of the new stage.

> . . . the full platform does more than assist; it entirely alters and recreates. It enables you to understand the processional values of the Elizabethan stage and the welcome it gave to the invasive masque. It enables you, further, to realize directly the stage-tactics of the time in which actors were often visible to the audience without being visible to one another. The apron-stage opened the door of that cage in which Elizabethan drama had been pent up; the platform stage removes all the four walls of the prison.
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> The platform also offers a multiple stage. . . . Thus one could understand the plasticity and variety of the Elizabethan stage method. There could be much and intricate movement since the platform was bigger than the stage of Drury Lane. There could also be a to-and-fro technique like that used by the cinema.[54]

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[52]William Poel's prompt-book of Fratricide Punished (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1956), p. 17.

[53]Speaight, p. 244.

[54]Ivor Brown, "Salute to William Poel," The Saturday Review, 16 July 1927, pp. 90-91.

The play that followed in February 1928, Ben Jonson's Sejanus, His Fall, further illustrated the advantages of the platform stage. Poel's production was described as swift in movement, though elaborate in design. Robert Speaight speaks of his own association with Poel as well as response to the production. "Sejanus was the first production in which I worked with Poel. He cast me for the 'choric' part of Arruntius and I was made up to resemble Ben Jonson himself. The play was variously costumed in classical and Elizabethan dress. . . . Dr. Percy Simpson, writing to Poel afterwards, said that never before had he 'seen an Elizabethan play done with so serene, effortless, and pure a beauty, and with such a sense of quiet, spacious grandeur.'"[55] A year later, in January 1929, Poel produced Fletcher's Bonduca on a similar stage. Coriolanus, in May 1931, was his last Shakespearean revival on a full platform stage. In 1932, Poel produced Peele's David and Bethsabe. This was his last production.

The Elizabethan Stage Society aimed "to give practical effect to the principle that Shakespeare should be accorded the build of stage for which he designed his plays."[56] This was Poel's greatest step in his pursuit of Elizabethan reform, demonstrating his reverence for the poet's constructive plan, the unity of design in which each scene is related to the rest of the play. His simple assumption that "Shakespeare invented

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[55]Speaight, p. 248.

[56]Norman Marshall, The Producer and the Play, p. 150.

his dramatic construction to suit his own particular stage,"[57] that his art was dependent upon the form of his theatre, and therefore the only place where he could be properly understood was in his own theatre. In a later contribution to The Saturday Review, Ivor Brown summarized the success of Poel's platform.

> The Elizabethan platform was not only far larger than the average modern stage, but its triple division gave scope for swift alterations from one place to another, both in structure and in temper. As soon as Mr. Poel recreates his platform stage he recreates the flow, the rhythm, and the energy of Elizabethan drama.[58]

Poel was motivated by a reaction against the scenery-ridden proscenium stage and a belief that the platform stage offered the true structure for presenting Elizabethan drama. His objective was the staging of plays in the Elizabethan manner. As a theatre practitioner, Poel wished to emphasize the play in relation to its audience, and he sought to illustrate that plays of the period could be fully appreciated only if presented in the Elizabethan manner.

In order to compare the motivations and objectives of both directors, and the effect of their objectives upon the play as produced, it is necessary to examine in detail two specific productions of Baker and Poel. Chapter V compares Poel's Hamlet staged in London in 1900 with Baker's Hamlet staged at Harvard in 1904.

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[57] Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 43.

[58] Ivor Brown, The Saturday Review, 18 February 1928, p. 190.

Chapter V

A COMPARISON OF THE FIRST QUARTO HAMLET STAGED BY POEL IN 1900 AND THE HARVARD HAMLET WITH FORBES ROBERTSON STAGED BY BAKER IN 1904

On February 21, 1900, William Poel staged the First Quarto Hamlet for a single performance in the Carpenters' Hall, London. On April 5 and 6, 1904, George Pierce Baker mounted a production of Hamlet with Johnston Forbes Robertson in Sanders Theatre at Harvard University. The two productions shared a number of remarkable similarities, however, each reflected the peculiarities of its environment as well as the motivations and objectives of its director.

Both productions of Hamlet shared one predominant objective: they were each an attempt to stage the play in the Elizabethan manner. Therefore, they were both seeking a departure from the illusionistic traditions of the nineteenth century. Although there were distinct differences - for example, one had a cast of amateurs, one was professional; one was performed for the public, one for a university - each production was an important step in the reformation of Elizabethan staging. It is important to note that although the two directors did not collaborate with each other, there were striking parallels between the versions. These parallels, along with the points of departure, can be appreciated by

examining and comparing several aspects of the two productions of Hamlet. These aspects include the text, the physical stage, the staging (which includes the director's interpretation and physical mounting of the play), the technical elements of the production, the acting, the audience, and finally, the critical response to each production.

Text

Baker and Poel both advocated a return to the Shakespearean text. They favored the use of the full text without a rearrangement of scenes, and they both insisted that the main focus of the production should be upon the story and characters as indicated by the author in his text. However, for these two productions of Hamlet, Baker and Poel used different texts. Poel used the First Quarto with additions from the First Folio, while Baker was working with the Folio version, slightly cut. Poel was more at liberty to make cuts and revisions, while Baker, who was somewhat limited by an already mounted production, made certain minor cuts to suit the particulars of his situation. With Poel's additions and Baker's deletions, the final scripts turned out to be surprisingly similar. Their playing times were approximately the same. Poel's was slightly over two hours; Baker's was two and a half. It is as if they were seeking a common denominator, a more complete and practical acting edition of the play. Neither production of Hamlet made transpositions. Each was extremely faithful to the sequence of events and the Elizabethan concept of scene by scene continuity.

Poel's version of the text was based upon his earlier staging of the play in 1881, which had followed strict adherance to the First Quarto. He evidently chose to make certain alteration based upon his experience with the earlier production. As he stated in his program note to the production in 1900:

> Presuming that the First Folio version was the Globe Playhouse acting edition of the play, and that the Second Quarto (allowing for printer's omissions) is Shakespeare's perfect work printed from his own manuscript, we have in the First Quarto a deliberate tampered version of the Globe Playhouse copy, reconstructed and compressed with considerable practical knowledge of stage requirements, a knowledge that shows the skill of the actor or stage manager, and not that of the poet or dramatist. Improved as the version of the First Quarto undoubtedly is in dramatic construction of a practical kind, it cannot be believed that the "improvements" were sanctioned by Shakespeare or appealed to his sympathies. Still, it is probable that a shorter version of so popular a play as Hamlet (shorter than that of the First Folio), was needed by Shakespeare's actors for representation in the provinces, or the palace, and further research may prove that it is this shorter, reconstructed version which the compiler of the First Quarto saw. For as regards the First Quarto in its relation to the Second Quarto, while there is no indication in the former of any knowledge of the additional lines which are to be found in the latter, there is evidence that the compiler of the First Quarto had an intimate knowledge of the First Folio Hamlet, without the help of which it is to be doubted if the compression of Act IV, so skillfully contrived in the First Quarto could have been done.[1]

Poel is attempting here to justify his additions to the First Quarto, which he still considered to be a valid acting edition. His references to its "considerable practical knowledge of stage requirements" and its evidence of "the skills

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[1]William Poel, program note to Hamlet, Carpenter's Hall, 21 February 1900, in the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

of the actor or stage manager," prove this to be true. It also shows that his basic philosophy had remained the same, that of approaching the text as a script. However, he justifies his additions by stating that the similarities between the quarto and folio indicate that the quarto compiler had an "intimate knowledge" of both. He cites the compression of Act IV in the First Quarto as evidence.

Poel also argues that the language of the First Quarto has all the marks of being Shakespeare's language imperfectly reported.

> . . . the very errors due to the actor's delivery or to the reporter's notes, are in themselves instructive. For there are many sins of commision which were apparently made by the speaker of Shakespeare's lines, those actor's liberties which are so often taken with the author's language; such as the interpolation of exclamations,. . . and the repetition of sentences such as "to a Nunnery goe, to a Nunnery goe." Again we have the transposition of the text occurring just where the actor would be likely to misplace his words, as of Hamlet's lines with the Ghost and again in the play scene, and the interpolation of lines in a later scene that should have been spoken in an earlier one, or the introduction of a line from another play where the actor's memory has failed to retain any of the words, an illustration of which occurs in the speech of Corambis -
>
> Such men often prove
> Great in their words, but little in their love,
>
> when the actor may have been thinking of Viola's words:
>
> For still we prove
> Much in our vows but little in our love.
>
> All actors who have served in a stock company, where the playbill has been changed nightly, know how easily these mistakes are made.[2]

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[2]Poel's program note to Hamlet, 1900.

Therefore Poel was using these program notes to justify his combination of First Quarto and First Folio material. The First Quarto was used because Poel considered it to be the actors' script, containing practical application and knowledge of the original text. The Folio additions were acceptable to Poel because he felt that the compiler of the First Quarto was already acquainted with the Folio version.

Among the passages from the Folio added to the First Quarto text, perhaps the most important was the "How all occasions do inform against me" speech.[3] Poel considered this to be an examination of conscience on Hamlet's part, because he had not done what he deeply believed to be his duty, and for Poel, this was the key speech of the play.[4]

Poel states that in the fourth scene of the Quarto, the line, "O horrible, most horrible,"[5] spoken by the Ghost, is marked in some acting editions to be spoken by Hamlet. Poel considered such an alteration unwarranted. "The first quarto, by making Hamlet exclaim 'O God' after the Ghost has said 'O horrible,' gives indication that the words 'O horrible' were

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[3]Poel's promptbook is an annotated copy of Hamlet, The First Quarto, 1603, edited by William Griggs (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1898). The only copy is located at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Griggs divided the Quarto into eighteen scenes and provided line numbers. The present quotation is a passage from the First Folio which Poel inserted without line numbers into scene xii of Griggs' edition. Subsequent references are to Poel's promptbook and are documented by scene and line numbers.

[4]Speaight, William Poel and The Elizabethan Revival, p. 56.

[5]Poel's promptbook, iv. 127.

spoken on the Elizabethan stage by the Ghost."[6] The line in the First Folio is also assigned to the Ghost, but was given to Hamlet in Baker's production.[7] For his production in 1900, Poel added the line, "Let not the royal bed of Denmark be a couch for luxury and damned incest,"[8] from the Folio Which is not found in the First Quarto. The insertion of this line, which is also spoken by the Ghost, is particularly surprising in view of the many cuts which Poel made for reasons of Victorian propriety. For example, Poel cut Hamlet's question to Ophelia, "What, do you think I meant country matters?"[9] because he felt that, although the line was appreciated by the Elizabethans, it would have offended Victorian sensibilities. It was for this reason that he also cut Ophelia's song which contains the lines, "The young man rose, and don'd his clothes/ and dupp'd the chamber door, Let in a maid, that out a maid/ Never departed more," as well as "Young men will do't when they come to't; By Cock, they are to blame."[10] Poel's deletions in

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[6]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 160.

[7]Hamlet, as arranged for the stage by Forbes Robertson (London: The Nassau Press, 1897) is based upon the "Cambridge" Shakespeare,and Furness's "Variorum" Shakespeare. The original promptbook is located at the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. I have used the copy at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Forbes Robertson divided this Hamlet into acts and scenes and provided line numbers. The reference here is to act I, scene iv, line 70. Subsequent references are to this edition, hereafter referred to as Forbes Robertson's Hamlet.

[8]Poel's promptbook, iv. 129-130.

[9]Ibid., ix. 85.

[10]Ibid., xiii. 106-108, 113-114.

deference to Victorian tastes were somewhat inconsistant. One line in particular, which by all other standards of decorum should have been cut, was curiously left intact. This is the Quarto line which reads, "Jesus! two months dead, and not forgotten yet?"[11] The Folio version reads, "O Heavens! die two months ago, and not forgotten yet?"[12] Evidently Poel toyed with the idea of eliminating it, for the word "Jesus" is marked, but there is no indication that it was in fact cut. A more curious marking occurs five lines later where Poel has indicated cuts for Ophelia's line, "Your jests are keen, my lord," and Hamlet's response, "It would cost you a groaning to take them off."[13]

Along with the additions to and deletions from the Quarto text, Poel made several alterations. For example, Hamlet's line to Gilderstone concerning the players, "and the lady shall have leave to speak her mind freely," was altered to read, "and the lady shall have leave to speak <u>your</u> mind freely. . ."[14] Poel's reasoning here is unclear. It may be that he wished Hamlet to infer that the players could speak the minds of others as well as their own, or perhaps Poel was indicating that the "lady" player, who was in this case a boy, was unimportant in relation to what was being said. Poel also altered one word in the Ghost's line, "Do not neglect, nor long time put it off. But

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[11]Poel's promptbook, ix. 155.

[12]Forbes Robertson's <u>Hamlet</u>, III. i. 310-11.

[13]Poel's promptbook, ix. 101-2.

[14]Ibid., vii. 88.

I perceive by her distracted looks Thy mother's fearful, and she stands amazed." For Poel's production it read, "As I perceive by her distracted looks. . ."[15] Again, the reasoning is uncertain, unless it perhaps created a more rapid transition between the lines.

An interesting comparison can be made between the Folio and Quarto versions of a particular line in the final scene of the play. In the Quarto, the Braggart Gentleman exchanges the following lines with Hamlet.

> Hamlet. Very well; if the King dare venture his wager, I dare venture my skull. When must this be?
>
> Gentleman. My lord, presently. The King and Her Majesty with the rest of the best judgment in the court are coming down into the outward palace.
>
> Hamlet. Go tell His Majesty I will attend him.
>
> Gentleman. I shall deliver your most sweet answer.[16]

The same exchange in the Folio reads as follows:

> Hamlet. How if I answer no?
>
> Osric. I mean my Lord, the opposition of your person in trial.
>
> Hamlet. Sir, I will walk here in the hall; if it please His Majesty, 'tis the breathing time of day with me; let the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the King hold his purpose, I will win for him if I can: if not, I'll gain nothing but my shame, and the odd hits.
>
> Osric. Shall I redeliver you even so?
>
> Hamlet. To this effect sir, after what flourish your nature will.[17]

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[15]Poel's promptbook, xi. 74.

[16]Ibid., xxii. 28-34.

[17]Forbes Robertson's Hamlet, V. ii. 59-70.

It is interesting to note that Poel chose to cut the Quarto lines in this instance and insert the Folio version. "The forcing of this duel upon Hamlet by the King would be better shown by the King and all the court coming down to Hamlet than Hamlet's going to them. It is the difference between his going to meet death and death coming to him."[18]

Although Poel was careful to compile what he considered to be an acceptable and accurate acting edition of the play, the critics were merely puzzled.

> Unfortunately, Mr, William Poel robbed last night's performance at Carpenters' Hall of most of its literary interest by not following the First Quarto as it stands. All one can say of the text spoken was that it was Mr. Poel's version of Hamlet. It jumped about from one quarto to another, and from quarto to folio, in a puzzling manner. . .[19]

Baker, on the other hand, did not have reviewers to contend with, and he encountered fewer problems by merely editing the Folio rather than attempting a compilation of two different texts. Baker was also less concerned about cutting so-called questionable passages from the play. It may have been his desire for a full-text Folio version, although he may have hesitated in making considerable cuts from an already mounted production. The most extensive cut in the Harvard production was Hamlet's exchange with Claudius after he has killed Polonius. Claudius states his plans to have Hamlet sent to England in an earlier passage.[20]

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[18]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 174.

[19]Times (London), 22 February 1900, p. 7.

[20]Forbes Robertson's Hamlet, III. ii. 4.

Forbes Robertson was also concerned with Victorian propriety, although not to the same extent as Mr. Poel. There is an interesting comparison between the editing practices of Poel and Forbes Robertson in Trewin's Shakespeare on the English Stage 1900-1964. The comments concern Poel's production of Measure for Measure in 1908. "Poel's puritan cutting and manipulation passed without comment: Forbes Robertson would have applauded his resolve to get through most of the play without using the word 'bawd,' but nobody could have been delighted by the substitution of 'self' for 'body' in 'By yielding up thy body to my will.'"[21] Trewin suggests that Poel might have scanned the line. Robert Speaight also points out that, for all his concern for accurate and musical speech, Poel "had little ear for metrical values or their reinforcement of dramatic meaning."[22]

One of the most important similarities between the two productions of Hamlet, is the fact that both included characters which were usually cut. The character of Reynaldo is found in both the First Quarto as well as the First Folio, although in the Quarto he is known as Montano. Poel explained the importance of his appearance. "In the beginning of the second act the scene between Polonius and Reynaldo is left out in all the acting versions. It is a very amusing scene, and in my opinion gives a better insight into the character of Polonius than any of the

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[21]Trewin, p. 49, f.

[22]Speaight, p. 100.

others."[23] Montano, of course, was uncut in Poel's production as was Reynaldo for the Harvard production.

Both productions retained the appearance of Fortinbras at the end of the play. Although his entrance is found in both the Folio and Quarto versions, it must be remembered that for Victorian audiences, his reappearance was an innovation, and for some, startling. George Bernard Shaw comments on the Forbes Robertson Hamlet in London.

> The Forbes Robertson "Hamlet" at the Lyceum is, very unexpectedly at that address, really not at all unlike Shakespeare's play of the same name. I am quite certain I saw Reynaldo in it for a moment; and possibly I may have seen Voltimand and Cornelius; but just as the time for their scene arrived, my eye fell on the word "Fortinbras" in the programme, which so amazed me that I hardly know what I saw for the next ten minutes. . . . The story of the play was perfectly intelligible, and quite took the attention of the audience off the principal actor at moments.[24]

It should be noted that Poel's Quarto version also included these characters, although their names differ: Reynaldo is Montano, Voltemand and Cornelius become Voltemar and Cornelia, and Fortinbras is Fortenbrasse.

Theatre managers had long ago dropped Fortinbras from the play, considering his final entrance anti-climatic to the death of Hamlet. Poel considered Fortinbras necessary for the restoration of order, which Shakespeare was careful to include in the evolution of his story. "Everything relating to Fortinbras is kept in the quarto, because Fortinbras has to

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[23]Poel, p. 161.

[24]George Bernard Shaw, Dramatic Opinions and Essays, (New York: Brentanos, 1906), II, 313.

appear like Richmond in 'Richard III,' as the hero who will restore peace and order to the distracted kingdom."[25] In his address to the New Shakespeare Society in June of 1881, Poel sought to appease those who favored a strong dramatic picture at the climax:

> I have before expressed my regret that the play should end at Hamlet's death. Shakespeare would have considered the play unfinished, and even the partisans of stage effect would lose nothing by the introduction of Fortinbras. The distant sound of the drum, the tramp of soldiers, the gradual filling of the stage with them, the shouts of the crowd outside, the chieftain's entrance fresh from his victories, and the tender, melancholy young prince, dead in the arms of his beloved friend, are material for a fine picture, a strong dramatic contrast. Life in the midst of death! Was not this Shakespeare's conceptions?[26]

Although Forbes Robertson evidently agreed with Poel and seemed to heed his advice by including Fortinbras in the play, and although Professor Baker must have applauded this restoration of the text, there were those who still questioned his motives. "Forbes Robertson brought Fortinbras back to Elsinore for the first time in 1897, not to complete the structure and meaning of the play, but merely to mount a tableau in which the Prince could be borne aloft on Swedish shields."[27]

Comparisons can be made between the stage directions of each text. Baker and Poel both followed the stage directions in their respective texts with a few exceptions. Poel felt that the stage directions in the First Quarto indicated what

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[25]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 157.

[26]Ibid., pp. 174-175.

[27]Styan, The Shakespeare Revolution, p. 28.

had been seen in performance rather than what may have been in the original script. Therefore, if the Ghost entered Gertrude's bedchamber "in his nightgown,"[28] this would explain Hamlet's remark that he was "in his habit as he lived."[29] If the King, Queen, Laertes and the other lords followed Ophelia's corpse "with a Priest after the coffin,"[30] who refused to approach the grave, this would show to what extent the rites were "maimed."

> The absence of religious ceremony should attract the attention of the audience as much as it does Hamlet's. I should like to see only one Priest present, and the coffin borne by soldiers or villagers, not by monks or nuns. It is often the stage practice for the Priest to stand over the grave with a book in his hand and intone his lines (replies to Laertes' questions) as if they were part of the burial service. A rather erroneous conception of Shakespeare's churlish Priest, who objects to the funeral taking place on sacred ground, and refuses even to approach the grave.[31]

In contrast, the Harvard production employed more than one priest in the grave scene.[32]

Poel also found it suggestive that only in the play scene was the King's entrance accompanied by a "flourish;" the play, he felt, had been produced as a domestic rather than an historical tragedy. Other stage directions in the First Quarto which

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[28]Poel's promptbook, xi. 61.

[29]Ibid., xi. 86-87.

[30]Ibid., xvi. 124.

[31]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, pp. 172-173.

[32]Forbes Robertson's Hamlet, V. i.

Poel retained include "Enter Ofelia playing on a lute, and her hair down, singing."[33] This, according to Poel, was the way she appeared on Burbage's stage. He maintained that the Queen would not have described Ophelia's floral weeds a few minutes later, if the audience had already seen them.

> I can imagine Ophelia entering as if she were wandering about the corridors of the palace singing and muttering to herself unconscious of what she was saying, where she was going, or to whom she was speaking; the imbecility of a pretty young girl who had been, at one time, fond of her songs as of her sewing. In the acting edition the stage direction for the second entrance describes her as being "fantastically dressed with straws and flowers," but there is no similar direction in the quartos or folio. Ophelia has very little time allowed her to go anywhere, and certainly not beyond the palace precincts, where she might not find straws and daisies. Shakespeare may have intended the flowers to be imaginary ones to which she refers that the audience may anticipate her ramble beyond the palace to make garlands in the meadows. Songs were rarely sung on the stage unaccompanied, and it must be remembered that Ophelia was a court lady, more accustomed to handle the lute than to pick wild-flowers.[34]

The stage directions for the "dumb show" within the play scene are found in both the Quarto and Folio texts and were restored in Poel's production but omitted in Baker's. The Folio version is more extensive and explicit in its directions, while the Quarto provides a condensed but practical version. Even in its abbreviated Quarto form, however, Poel considered the dumb show an important element of the play scene.

> The "dumb show" is omitted in all the stage-versions, and is not represented on the stage, but I think the play-scene is imperfectly realized by leaving it out. The Queen's reply to Hamlet's question,

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[33]Poel's promptbook, xiii. 14.

[34]Poel, pp. 171-172.

> "Madame, how like you the play?" and the King's inquiry, "Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in it?" would have deeper significance with it represented; for evidently the poisoning in the "dumb show" has made no impression on the Queen, but a very marked one on the King, and Hamlet's reply, "poison in jest," assumes quite a different meaning. Besides, Hamlet's words, "The croaking raven doth bellow for revenge," shows that he already has become convinced of the King's guilt before the appearance of Lucianus - and how, except by means of the "dumb show?"[35]

An overall comparison, then, between the two texts shows that the major differences were those of the First Quarto as opposed to the First Folio. The First Quarto used by Poel was often referred to as imperfect in comparison to the later versions,[36] while the First Folio was much closer to the acting editions which have become popular in the twentieth century. The major similarities between the texts include the restoration of certain characters and scenes which had been omitted in the past, for example, the exchange between Reynaldo and Polonius, and most importantly, the restoration of Fortinbras at the end of the play. Perhaps the most significant similarity, however, was a shift in focus from the individual characters of the play to an emphasis upon the story as indicated in the text.

Stage

The basic stage structure for both versions of Hamlet had been used for earlier productions. Baker's stage was basically the same used for his production of The Silent Woman

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[35]Poel, pp. 166-167.

[36]Speaight, Shakespeare on the Stage, p. 20.

in 1895; Poel's had been built for his Measure for Measure in 1893. The original structures were based in large part upon the contract for the Fortune Theatre erected in 1600, and these were altered in accordance with the latest investigations into Elizabethan playhouse architecture. The Johannes DeWitt drawing of the Swan Theatre published in 1888 also influenced the stage structure for both productions of Hamlet. However, despite a strict adherence to these guidelines, the stages were architecturally different, due to the fact that they were both constructed within the framework of existing buildings.

Baker and Poel both consulted authorities outside their field to aid in the authenticity of their reconstruction. Baker called upon other departments within the university.

> Professor H. Langford Warren, of the Department of Architecture, who, after careful study of the existing contracts for the Fortune and the Hope theatre and many details in Henslowe's Diary and Elizabethan stage directions, drew designs for a reconstruction and a repainting of the old set. The plans, though according with the latest investigation, were so made as to raise as many mooted points as possible.[37]

Baker and Poel were careful to consider the indications provided by stage directions in Elizabethan scripts. Although the dimensions of each stage were not exactly those of the Fortune, they were very close. Baker describes his alterations to the university hall as well as the particulars of the new stage.

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[37]George Pierce Baker, "Hamlet on an Elizabethan Stage," Shakespeare Jahrbuch, XLI, 1905, p. 296.

> Sanders Theatre, though it has only a platform in lieu of stage, has two galleries which are in much the same relation to the pit as were galleries of an Elizabethan Theatre; that is, the first balcony is but a few steps above the orchestra seats. Moreover Sanders Theatre measures 47 feet across at the widest part of the pit, and the Fortune apparently measured 43. Consequently it was easy, with plans drawn to scale, almost to reproduce the proportions of the Fortune. In order to represent as far as possible the interior of the old-time theatre, a painted cloth showing a tiled roof against a blue sky was carried round the building from one corner of the set to the other. Even behind the set a huge blue cloth suggested sky. The line of tiling of the stageset fitted into the tiling of the strip running round the theatre. To complete the effect, the caryatids (Satiers of the contracts) supporting the galleries in the set were continued under the regular galleries.
>
> The stage was made a little smaller than that of the Fortune, 40 feet wide by 20 deep, instead of 43 by 21:6. The galleries of the set, practicable in the first story, were carried round to meet the regular galleries on each side of the stage. Above the stage was built the shadow or heavens, the structure like a porte-cochere well known from the print of the Swan Theatre in 1596. Above this roof rose a practicable hut. with a platform at its right on which a trumpeter sounded thrice for the performance to begin. High above all, from a corner of this hut, floated the flag of the theatre. When the orchestra had been cleared of seats. and it and the stage were strewn with dried rushes, the resemblance of Sanders Theatre to an Elizabethan theatre was striking.[38]

The most complete description of Poel's stage is to be found in a sale catalogue, prepared for the disposal by auction, London, 5 July 1905, of the property belonging to the Elizabethan Stage Society. This was just a little over a year after Baker's stage was constructed at Harvard. The basic structure of Poel's stage had been in use for thirteen years, ever since the production of Measure for Measure in 1893. The advertisement reads:

> This unique model of the old Fortune Playhouse, having a frontage of 30 feet with a depth of 24 feet.

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[38]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, pp. 296-298.

> The entire height is 21 feet. This is the original stage with working equipment, designed by Mr. William Poel, and used at the performances of the Elizabethan Stage Society. It was copied in actual dimensions from a contemporary Builder's Contract and is correct in historical and other details. It comprises a substantial stained oak stage, constructed to easily fit up, with bolts and nuts complete. There is a practical rostrum and balcony and canvas painted cloths, representing galleries, boxes and amphitheatre, two entrances to Stage under balcony, and centre entrance, closed by pair of painted oak doors, two pillar supports, 18 feet high, to carry the roof or "Heaven" to centre of stage, with facsimile ceiling piece of blue ground and gilt stars and covered by a lean-to tile painted roof joining on the tyring house, roof and wall, a pair of reproduction curtains, each 18 feet high by 9 feet, suspended on brass rods between the pillars, with ropes, pullies, etc; also the back curtains similar material of different design, each 8 feet square, with ropes and pullies. There are also tapestry curtains for doors under balcony, matting for floor of Stage, painted canvas palisade for front of platform. The whole in excellent order and condition and in perfect working order, together with the whole of the equipment, including two Jacobean chairs, carved table and other movable furniture.[39]

A comparison of the descriptions reveals the remarkable similarity between the two stages. Although Poel had less width than Baker, the London stage had more depth. There were several features of both stages which were almost identical. These inlcuded the main upstage unit which supported the inner above and inner below (both inner aboves were practical), the pillars supporting the heavens, and painted cloths representing the galleries. Baker's gallery was practical in the first story, Poel's in the first and second. In addition, each stage had a practical hut above the roof of the heavens. The most significant similarity, however, was the use of front curtains in

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[39]Arthur J. Harris, "William Poel's Elizabethan Stage: The First Experiment," Theatre Notebook XVII, no. 4 (Summer, 1963), p. 112.

both productions. These were suspended on rods between the main pillars and could be opened or closed with the use of ropes and pullies. Baker's curtains were operated from a space corresponding to the third gallery, Poel's from immediately behind the pillars. Both productions also had curtains hanging from the inner above which were different in design from the longer front curtains.

There were a number of distinguishing features of each stage. For example, Poel included two doorways on either side of the inner below, which were also draped with curtains. Baker merely had curtained entrances on either side. One of the discoveries made by Baker during his production concerned the possible covering for the inner stage and the use of doors on either side.

> Purposely, only entrances under the gallery were arranged for, but the performances simply strengthened any feeling, based on the direct statement of some of the old stage directions, that the space where the arras hung could in Shakespeare's day be closed with doors, arras, or even gates. In other words, it was an open space which the stage manager filled as his play required. But it became clear, too, that probably there were other entrances than those under the gallery. Stage directions call for them, and if the curtains used in the revival, or any modifications of them, be justified, then there should be entrances and exits from the stage outside them. I believe that it was possible to enter the main stage beyond the arras at each side.[40]

Poel had a rostrum within the inner below, whereas Baker did not. This may have been more concern for sight lines than authenticity. Baker preferred to pull the action downstage rather than raise the level of the inner stage.

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[40]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 300.

The most important structural difference, however, between the two productions, was the actual platform stage in relation to the theatre itself, or more specifically, in relation to the audience. Baker was more successful in constructing an actual platform stage which projected into the house and upon which the actors could be surrounded by the audience and observed from all three sides. Not only did he remove the chairs in front of the stage, he costumed students as Elizabethan groundlings and stationed them around the platform. Poel, on the other hand, in spite of his struggle for authenticity, was only able to construct an Elizabethan stage within a proscenium arch. The audience, sitting in a long row at the edge of the stage, was unable to surround the action of the play; and the actors, whom Poel costumed and placed on the stage as Elizabethan audience members, must have seemed far removed from the actual Victorian audience. As C. E. Montague pointed out in 1911, "the Elizabethan theatre was the fusion or interpenetration of stage and auditorium, and the essence of the modern theatre is their separation by the proscenium arch."[41] The audience for Poel's Hamlet was still looking through the key-hole, they were not inside the room. Commenting on Poel's production of Measure for Measure at the Gaiety Theatre in 1908, Mr. Montague described Poel's acheivement.

> Mr. Poel did wonders, but he could not get rid of the proscenium arch. What he gave us was not an

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[41] C. E. Montague, Dramatic Values (New York: Macmillan Co., 1911), p. 243.

> Elizabethan stage as it was to Elizabethan play-goers, but a picture of an Elizabethan stage seen through the frame of a modern proscenium. So we gained a good visual idea of a Shakespearean stage, but not the Elizabethan sensation of having an actor come forward to the edge of a platform in the midst of ourselves . . . .[42]

There were certain theatres in which Poel would have a small apron in front of the proscenium arch, but it was usually less than five feet deep and extended the full width of the stage. Poel still placed costumed actors on stage to the right and left, although they were usually at the proscenium arch if not within it.

Therefore, the two stages were most similar in regard to the main upstage unit which supported the inner above and formed the inner below, and the use of front curtains between the main pillars. The most striking difference between the stages was their relation to the theatres themselves. Baker was more successfully Elizabethan in projecting a platform into the audience, while Poel's stage was still confined within the proscenium arch.

Staging

In the same manner as the Elizabethan theatre, the stage for both productions of Hamlet was divided into three basic acting areas, the inner above, the inner below, and the platform or front stage. Both directors used all three areas extensively. In many instances scenes were staged in the same areas for both productions. The majority of the play in both cases, as well as exposition, soliloquies, indoor and large

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[42]C.E. Montague, Dramatic Values, p. 244.

cast scenes, were staged on the platform downstage of the pillars. The two directors would draw the front curtains, which were hung between the pillars, for certain exterior scenes, for example the opening scene and the first entrance of Fortinbras. The use of front curtains also facilitated certain minor scene changes. Both stages also had an arras which hung from the upper stage to the stage proper with a center opening, and it was behind this in both productions that Polonius was killed. It was probably the decision on the part of both directors to use a front curtain between the downstage pillars which was the most innovative and striking similarity between the two stagings.

Both Baker and Poel based many of their directorial decisions upon stage directions already present in their respective texts. The First Folio Hamlet, however, contains numerous stage directions, while the quarto has almost none. Poel, therefore, was much more at liberty, and based decisions upon his knowledge of Elizabethan staging, as well as his earlier production of Hamlet in 1881. Baker made many decisions based upon the established practices of Forbes Robertson's company (many of which, in turn, were based upon directions in the folio), as well as the specific demands of his Harvard stage.

Poel could be extremely particular concerning stage directions. For example, one note in his promptbook, which indicates that Corambis (Polonius) enters in the second scene with the King, is amended on the next page that he enters

alone, salutes the courtiers, then returns to enter again with the King and Queen. Later, in the third scene, Poel indicates that Laertes is to kneel before Polonius' line, "Farewell. My blessing with thee."[43] Likewise, Hamlet kneels at the Ghost's feet following the line, "I am thy father's spirit,. . ." and rises again on "Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift as meditation. . ."[44]

Although the Folio is not as specific in its stage directions, Baker did not insert such details, but left many decisions to the discretion of his actors and made more generalized suggestions in staging. For example, it was Baker's idea to stage the players' performance of "The Murder of Gonzago" in the upper stage. Although somewhat unusual, it may have been Baker's intention to use the inner above to its full advantage for a more frequent alteration of scenes. Such an arrangement would also have placed the King facing upstage with Hamlet facing downstage in a prominent position to observe the King. In Poel's version, the play-within-the-play as well as the dumb show were staged down right on a movable platform rostrum, placing both the players and their stage audience on an equal plane. Poel's directions also indicate for Hamlet to cross onto the rostrum following the King's exit, perhaps establishing Hamlet's desire to participate in his staging of "The Mousetrap."

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[43]Poel's promptbook, iii. 42.

[44]Ibid., iv. 68, 91-92.

There are several other scenes which were staged quite differently in the two productions. One of the most important decisions in staging for both directors, was the handling of the Ghost's entrance in the closet scene. The approach of each director was unique. In Poel's production, the Ghost entered from the upstage center curtain and moved on a diagonal down right on the main platform; while in Baker's, he appeared in the shadows of the upper stage. This decision on the part of Baker was perhaps the most significant change from the original staging of the Forbes Robertson company. It made a remarkable impression on the actors as well as the audience, but perhaps even more so on the principal player. In an article in the Shakespeare Jahrbuch, Baker discusses the staging alteration in his production and its effect upon Forbes Robertson.

> When the Ghost, in mail, glided across the grey-brown background of painted cloth, in the somewhat shadowed upper stage, he seemed only a face. The first night Mr. Forbes Robertson was so startled by the effectiveness of the Ghost as nearly to miss his lines, and after the performance he declared that hereafter on the regular stage the Ghost in his Hamlet should get his ghostliness by dressing in tones which will shade into the color of the set. The effect was incomparably better than any Ghost with lime-light or electric bulb.[45]

Poel seems to have been more concerned with timing. The matter of when the Ghost enters was evidently more important than where he enters, but Poel's ultimate goal, that of surprise, was the same as that achieved in the Harvard production. In his promptbook, Poel designates that the center curtains

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[45]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 299.

of the inner below are suddenly drawn open for the Ghost's appearance, and states that this action and its execution are "Most Important."[46] As he stated with his earlier staging of Hamlet, ". . . the attention of an audience is better sustained if the entrances of characters, especially of the Ghost, is not anticipated, and also if the dialogue is not interrupted by pauses for entrances and exits."[47] Poel also states that for this entrance, the Ghost should enter Gertrude's bedchamber "in his nightgown,"[48] as indicated in the First Quarto text. This, according to Poel, would explain Hamlet's line, "My father in the habit/as he lived!"[49]

There are indications that both Baker and Poel chose to stage the early exchanges between Hamlet and Ophelia, and Hamlet and Polonius as exteriors. The inner above of Baker's stage, when in use, was backed with a painted cloth which could represent either the wall of a gallery opening into the Queen's chamber, or a rampart outside of the castle.[50] Therefore Baker was able to indicate an exterior with the forward curtains either opened or closed. Poel suggests that even though most acting editions indicate that the Folio's Act II, Scene ii, is called "A Room in the Castle,"[51] it would be more

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[46]Poel's promptbook, xi. 61.

[47]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 158.

[48]Poel's promptbook, xi. 61.

[49]Ibid., 86-87.

[50]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 299

[51]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 161.

effective as an exterior.

> It is true that Polonius remarks, "Here in the lobby," but the line next to this in the first quarto suggests that he is pointing to some place off the scene, for he adds, "There let Ophelia walk," and Ophelia is on the stage. An exterior scene would, in my opinion, give more meaning to the words, "Will you walk out of the air, my lord?" and to Hamlet's speech, "This most excellent canopy the air, look you." The scene of a palace garden or cloister could be well introduced in a play so full of interiors.[52]

Poel also had some strong ideas about the staging of Hamlet's exchange with Ophelia later in the same scene. As Poel points out, many acting versions provide a stage direction for Hamlet to exit following the word "Farewell" in his speech to Ophelia, and to re-enter directly afterwards, thus conveying the impression that he returns in order to give more force to his reproaches. "These stage directions are not to be found in either of the quartos or yet in the folio, and I can find no foundation for them in the text. They seem to me to be an unnecessary interruption in a solemn scene, and to interfere with its impressiveness. Hamlet is dismissing Ophelia to a nunnery, and the word 'Farewell' is added to impress her with the necessity of her going. She must leave him, not he her."[53] The fact that these directions are not found in the folio, and because there is no indication to prove otherwise, we must assume that Forbes Robertson did not execute them either, although their inclusion had been a strong stage

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[52]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, pp. 161-162.

[53]Ibid., p. 165.

tradition dating from the time of Edmund Kean, when he left Ophelia's side and returned to kiss her hand before hurrying off again.[54]

Baker and Poel had very different ideas about the staging of Hamlet's speech comparing the portraits of his father and Claudius. In Baker's production, Hamlet referred to a miniature portrait of his father worn about his neck, and compared it to a similar miniature of Claudius worn by Gertrude. The lines in the Folio give little time to refer anywhere else, "Look here upon this picture, and on this, the counterfeit presentment of two brothers."[55] It was Poel's belief, however, that the portraits were elsewhere. As Robert Speaight points out in his book, William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival, Poel was always perplexed by the problem of the pictures. There were several possibilities; either the two portraits could be shown in miniature, hanging on the walls (unlikely on the Elizabethan stage, Speaight says), in the mind's eye (in which case, Poel maintained that Hamlet's description would have been unconvincing to the Queen), or Hamlet might have waved to a corridor where the pictures were visible to the Queen but not to himself or the audience. According to Speaight, this was the staging that Poel "perversely preferred."[56] Speaight goes on to say that it is impossible for

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[54]William Hazlitt, "A View of the English Stage," in The Collected Works of William Hazlitt, edited by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, 12 vols. (London, 1903), VIII, 188.

[55]Forbes Robertson's Hamlet, III. ii. 124-125.

[56]Speaight, p. 224.

an actor speaking the line, "See what a grace was seated on this brow," not to be looking with a loving intentness at the image of his father, whether that image is a miniature, a portrait, or a picture in the mind's eye. "No man would talk like that about a portrait hanging in the next room."[57] For his production in 1900, Poel solved the problem for Mr. Speaight and presented another alternative. The picture of Hamlet's father was in miniature, but the portrait of Claudius was on an easel stage left in the bedchamber.[58] This does correspond more accurately to the lines as indicated in the First Quarto, for Hamlet refers first to his fatehr's picture, and then ten lines later, that of his uncle.

Poel also felt that the body of Polonius should remain onstage throughout the closet scene in full view of the audience. Poel believed that Polonius, after being stabbed by Hamlet, should stagger through the arras and fall dead at the extreme front of the stage. In this way a natural grouping is formed and the transition of Hamlet's thought in the later passages of the scene is less abrupt.[59] Therefore, if the body is fully visible to Hamlet and the audience, Hamlet's line, "Come sir, I'll provide for you a grave,"[60] is more logical. Forbes Robertson indicates a stage direction at the end of Act IV, scene i, in which the body of Ophelia is

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[57]Speaight, p. 224.

[58]Poel's promptbook, xi.

[59]Speaight, p. 224.

[60]Poel's promtbook, xi. 109.

carried onstage at the end of Gertrude's speech. "Enter Courtiers, carrying Ophelia on a bier. Curtain."[61] This staging took place at Harvard without the curtain.

The grave digger scene provides several interesting contrasts between the staging of the two productions. Although both directors indicate a downstage trap for Ophelia's grave, they were used quite differently. In Baker's production, the two clowns delivered most of their opening lines while standing in the grave, but Poel provides for a "green mound" downstage right. It may have been for purposes of sightlines, but at one point, one of the clowns crosses down and sits on the mound. He throws up a skull (evidently from behind the mound), and on the line, "Look you, here's a skull hath been here this dozen yeare. . .,"[62] Poel indicates that he "rolls skull down to Hamlet."[63]

Poel also specifies that instead of Hamlet leaping into the grave, as stated in the Quarto stage direction, Hamlet pulls Laertes out. Laertes then seizes Hamlet and drags him downstage on the line, "The devil take thy soul,"[64] where they grapple down center. The King and Horatio then pull Hamlet off Laertes. Again, this may have been to improve sightlines more than

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[61]Forbes Robertson's Hamlet, end of IV. i.

[62]Poel's promptbook, xvi. 85.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid., 146.

anything else. Forbes Robertson indicates that Laertes leaps from the grave to grapple with Hamlet.[65] In response to the Quarto direction that Hamlet leaps into the grave, Poel commented that "Our modern Hamlets would object to this business as undignified."[66] Whether Hamlet pulls Laertes from the grave or leaps in after him, the important point for Poel was for Hamlet to be the aggressor, for as he explains, "Hamlet's public apology to Laertes in the last scene requires some marked movement of his in this scene. He own himself that he was in a towering passion. Laertes may handle Hamlet roughly, but not till Hamlet has interfered with him."[67]

There is a slight difference in the staging of Hamlet's death. Although both Baker and Poel have Hamlet borne from the stage by soldiers (Forbes Robertson was actually borne aloft on Swedish shields),[68] Poel adds another "picture" to the scene. He indicates that the Queen dies in a chair, while Claudius dies down left. Hamlet goes to the Queen and delivers his last speech kneeling at her feet. He finally falls and is raised and placed on a chair beside the Queen, the crown in his lap.[69] Eventually, in both productions, the body of Hamlet was carried through the upstage center opening of the inner below.

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[65]Forbes Robertson's Hamlet, V. i. 230.

[66]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 173.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Styan, p. 28.

[69]Poel's promptbook, xviii. 106.

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of each production was the audience contact which the staging afforded. Evidently there was more audience contact in Poel's production than in Baker's. Baker's comment that the audience listened attentively, and especially during Forbes Robertson's scenes, is one indication that there was little outward exchange between actor and audience. Poel, on the other hand, encouraged his actors not only to be aware of the audience but to play to them as well, and he continually stressed the importance of the aside. Poel often interpreted lines as asides which were not designated so in the text. For example, Hamlet's line, "He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or else he sleeps,"[70] and Laertes, "And yet it goes almost against my conscience,"[71] are marked as asides in Poel's promptbook.

> He maintained, too, that the reproach, "I have heard of your paintings, too," might have been directed generally against those married women who conducted themselves like the Queen, not against Ophelia at all. If the Dumb-Show were retained, as we know it was retained at the performance at St. George's Hall, it would prevent the actor rising to his climax at the lines: "He poisons him in the garden for his estate, etc." These should be spoken to the Court and not to the King; the last thing Hamlet would want was to drive Claudius prematurely from the play. It was when the King heard him explain to the other spectators that presently they would see how the murderer got the love of Gonzago's wife - it was then that he broke up the assembly, not wishing them on any account to see it.[72]

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[70]Poel's promptbook, vii. 166-167.

[71]Ibid., xviii. 81.

[72]Speaight, p. 55.

In summary, the staging in both productions utilized three basic acting areas, the inner above, the inner below, and platform or front stage. However, most of the action in both cases was placed downstage on the platform. There are indications that Baker's production (in spite of his projecting platform), invited less audience contact than Poel's; and for whatever reason (perhaps an effort to break the confines of the proscenium frame), Poel encouraged his characters to address the audience and thus promoted an exchange between actor and spectator.

Technical Elements

The technical elements are those stage appointments or effects either called for in the text or deemed necessary by the director to clarify or enhance the action of the play. One of the important things to consider in comparing the technical elements of these two productions of Hamlet, is that in essence both directors were striving for an absence of technical elements, or more precisely, a subtraction of elements to the Elizabethan minimum. Most of the technical elements used accentuated the platform stage itself. Again, the directors were limited by the particulars of their respective environments. For example, both stages were built within enclosed structures. Therefore, artificial lighting was used. However, in both cases, there was general lighting throughout the hall with no attempt to darken the audience or spotlight principal actors. The technical elements discussed include costumes, lighting, properties, and music.

The costumes for both productions of Hamlet were Elizabethan. Poel's costumes were more strictly Elizabethan

than Baker's, for the Forbes Robertson company, acting on the theory that Shakespeare's company often combined periods, added occasional Danish accessories. Poel disagreed with this practice. "Perhaps it is not a matter of great consequence, unless the period chosen for representation be the Elizabethan one, and I would suggest that this is the most appropriate period for the play, because to adopt an early Danish period is contradictory to the text. . . .Shakespeare's thoughts were not in Denmark when he wrote the play."[73] Although Poel followed costume notes in the First Quarto, for example, "Enter the Ghost in his nightgown,"[74] his adherence was not always as strict. Poel stated that Hamlet's appearance in the church yard suggests a change of apparel.

> From the familiar way in which the clown talks to Hamlet, and Hamlet's declaration, "Behold, 'tis I, Hamlet, the Dane," I imagine that Shakespeare intended Hamlet to be dressed in some disguise in this scene. When Hamlet, writing to the King, says, "Naked and alone," he may not only mean unarmed, but stripped of his fine clothes, so that it would not be inappropriate for him to appear at the grave in some common sailor's dress. In the second scene in this act Hamlet says, "With my sea-gown scarf'd about me," a line that also would furnish some excuse for change of costume.[75]

The reviewer of Poel's production commented on Hamlet's change of attire and Horatio's costume as well. "The costumes were Elizabethan, as usual. . . . Horatio was more the student than the soldier, though Hamlet addresses him as such. Hamlet, of course, wore his customary suit of solemn black, but he varied

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[73]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 163.

[74]Poel's promptbook, xi. 61.

[75]Poel, pp. 173-174.

it at the graveside by returning from his voyage in pirate's costume."[76]

Although general lighting was used in both Carpenters' and Sanders Halls, there are indications that attempts were made to dim the lights for particular scenes. For example, Baker talks of "the somewhat shadowed upper stage,"[77] and Poel's promptbook indicates several changes in the level of the lights. The lights were dimmed for the Ghost's entrance and then raised again after his exit.[78] It is apparent that Mr. Poel was not always opposed to the creation of certain visual effects. He comments that the Folio Hamlet calls for torches when the court enters to see the play. "It is a pity, I think, that these directions are not inserted in our acting versions. It would make a pretty picture for the stage to be darkened, and to have the mimic play acted by torchlight."[79] Although torches were not used, it appears that lighting levels varied more in Poel's production than in Baker's.

The properties used in both productions were quite similar. There was a minimum of furniture pieces in each, which included benches, stools, and chairs. Other items in common were parchments, books, and the recorder's pipe for the play scene. There were differences, however, such as Poel's easel in the closet scene and Baker's miniature portraits. Ophelia

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[76] Times (London), 22 February 1900, p. 7.

[77] Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 299.

[78] Poel's promptbook, i, iv, and xi.

[79] Poel, p. 166.

carried a lute in the London production, whereas Gertrude Elliot, Mrs. Forbes Robertson, had only flowers at Harvard. Poel gave the clown a pickaxe and spade as indicated in the First Quarto text. He also brought on a mound for the church yard and added several skulls and bones. Baker used only the stage trap and two skulls for the same scene. Baker scattered dried rushes in the "pit" as well as on stage. There were no signs used in either Hamlet to indicate time or place.

Mention has already been made of the front curtains used by both Baker and Poel. These were an integral part of the Elizabethan stage as conceived by the directors and not technical elements as such. However, Baker added two side curtains which made their use even more unconventional. He explains his reasoning as follows.

> Of course, the point in the setting most sure to rouse unfavorable criticism is the great curtains, especially when it is stated that corresponding curtains ran back from the pillars to the rear wall. Let us admit at the start that, though in the somewhat flimsy construction of the revival all the curtains could not be drawn from the back but the front ones must be managed by stool-boys, in a regular theatre all could be managed from behind the arras. Secondly, let us take the height of the curtains as purely experimental. In all ways but one they would be equally useful if they ran only as high as the level of the upper stage, but the one objection is that if lower they allow people in the two upper galleries to see all that goes on behind them. Their advantage, whether high or low, is that they arrange adequately for the many curtain scenes in the old plays, that they permit changes without the disillusioning lugging to and fro of properties by stage-keepers etc., necessarily employed when the curtains

> are supposed, as in Mr. W. J. Lawrence's article in Englische Studien to hang where the arras did in the Hamlet revival.[80]

In other words, Mr. Baker was using his front curtains in the same way that most directors were accustomed to using the arras. It would also seem that with additional side curtains, Baker was attempting to move the inner below further downstage and onto the platform. It is true that he was concerned with the poor acoustics and sightlines of the space beneath the gallery. "Anyone who attended the Hamlet performances knows that anything happening under the gallery must have been invisible to a large part of the audience, (and) very probably, unless shouted, wellnigh inaudible, and surely ill-lighted."[81]

Elizabethan music was provided for both productions. In addition to the trumpet flourishes for certain entrances and the use of a drum for the King's wassail pledge in Poel's production, the use of music was limited primarily to before and after the performances. Although the authenticity of the instruments is questionable, Baker states that "as the modern audience came in, four or five musicians in one of the boxes at the left of the stage played Elizabethan airs."[82] Evidently, music was provided for the ending of the play as well. Forbes Robertson wrote to Baker, "We shall not need the music for the

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[80]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 300.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Ibid., p. 298.

grave scene, but we ought to have the last march played if possible."[83] Poel was more authentically Elizabethan with his use of a pipe and tabor. The music, which was provided by Arnold Dolmetsch, was favorably mentioned in Poel's review. "Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch's plaintive music added charm to the performance; indeed there was too little of it."[84]

Mr. Dolmetsch provided music regularly for the Elizabethan Stage Society and contributed to the success of their revivals. In his review of the Society's production of The Tempest in 1897, George Bernard Shaw compares Dolmetsch's music to that which might be heard at the Lyceum Theatre. "If Sir Henry Irving were to put the play on at the Lyceum next season. . . he would give us the screaming violin instead of the harmonious viol; 'characteristic' music scored for wood-wind and percussion by Mr. German instead of Mr. Dolmetsch's pipe and tabor."[85] The simplicity of the pipe and tabor, as well as Baker's "four or five musicians," contributed to the Elizabethan atmosphere in both productions.

The technical elements in the two versions of Hamlet were quite similar. The directors for both productions sought an elimination of technical elements to the Elizabethan minimum, and the few appointments which were considered necessary were in some cases identical. The most notable difference, perhaps,

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[83]Forbes Robertson's letter to Baker dated 1 April 1904, 326 West End Avenue, New York; Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[84]Times (London), 22 February 1900, p. 7.

[85]Shaw, Our Theatre in the Nineties, pp. 241-242.

was Baker's use of side curtains in addition to those in front, and the question arises as to whether Poel would have resorted to a similar device had he been able to project his platform stage into the audience. The productions were alike in their general approach to costumes, properties, and music, and perhaps the most similar technical aspect was their use of general lighting throughout the performances.

Acting

One of the most difficult aspects for comparison between the two productions of Hamlet concerns the acting. First of all, there were distinct differences in the two companies themselves. Poel was working with an amateur cast, while Baker's was professional. Poel rehearsed his cast for a performance of one night only; the company of Forbes Robertson had been touring with the production for several years. These circumstances must have produced very different effects in performance, especially in the quality of acting. It would be impossible to compare such effects. However, in light of each director's objectives, and the comments made by those who witnessed each version, conclusions can be drawn concerning the acting in both productions.

The fact that Poel was working with an amateur cast was not always a disadvantage for him. Poel was concerned with creating an ensemble effect and was opposed to the idea of a star performer. He wished to establish a sense of unity among his cast members and a collective loyalty to his

objectives as a director. An amateur cast, therefore, was perhaps more pliable for his purposes.

Poel was especially concerned that his actors follow the dictations of his system of "tones," and his Hamlet reflected an emphasis on elocution. As Poel reminded his actors, "when Hamlet bade the player 'Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue,' he was thinking of the rhymed verse that he had just composed. In rhymed or blank verse, each syllable must have a definite sound."[86] Poel stated that the enjoyment of the play "depends more upon the appropriate rendering of the text than upon the scenic accessories."[87] Such an emphasis upon elocution and a preoccupation with "tones" is evident in a review of Poel's production.

> Hamlet was spiritedly played and with good elocution, but Mr. Richard Hoodless hardly conveyed the subtleties of the character, and one lost the flashes of wild humor that light up its tragic gloom. Polonius, or Corambis, as the First Quarto calls him, was acted in very odd fashion by an actor who was unnamed on the programme, but in whom one seemed to recognize Mr. Poel himself. The advice to Laertes was delivered with the air of an absent-minded curate reading the lessons. Later on the chamberlain descended more to the colloquial, but it was an entirely new reading of the part all through. The Ghost was a substantial phantom, and the pains of purgatory appeared to have worn away all the notes of his voice but one. In the closet scene he appeared, according to the stage directions, in his nightgown. But he looked both more at his ease and more ghost-like in armour.[88]

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[86]Speaight, p. 67.

[87]Poel, p. 166.

[88]Times (London), 22 February 1900, p. 7.

Baker was less concerned with the elocution of his actors, and if he had any influence on his cast in this respect, pushed for a more natural delivery of the text.

One of the most significant differences between the two companies was the fact that one was all male and the other included females. In his effort to revive the Elizabethan experience more completely, Poel used only men and boys in the female roles. It is evident from the reviews that this serious quest for authenticity was not received with seriousness by all the critics. In spite of some compliments, there was a touch of mockery in their remarks.

> There was a fresh element of novelty, too, added to the curious surroundings of all Mr. Poel's productions. The society became for the nonce more Elizabethan than ever, and the female parts were all taken by boys and men. Ophelia became a comely maid in the hands of Master Bartington, who really acted the part wonderfully well - for a boy. The Queen was very fair too, though her sobs were too manlike and tempestuous, and her cheeks made one appreciate the old joke about an audience being kept waiting while the heroine was getting herself shaved.[89]

The critic also remarked that "Ophelia in a ruff is rather a blow to the imagination." In his revival of an Elizabethan company, however, Mr. Poel's was by far the more authentic. The audience reaction to men playing women's roles was not unusual for 1900, and would perhaps be similar today. It must be remembered that Elizabethan audiences were accustomed to seeing an all-male cast (indeed, the appearance of a woman on stage in 1600 would have caused a similar stir), and therefore

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[89] Times (London), 22 February 1900, p. 7.

were able to distance themselves from such a theatrical convention. Poel may or may not have anticipated the reaction of his audience; his primary concern in this instance was authenticity. The company of Forbes Robertson not only included women in the roles of Gertrude and Ophelia, but several ladies-in-waiting as well. Gertrude Elliott played Ophelia and perhaps called less attention to the role than Master Bartington, although Baker remarked that she "played Ophelia with much sweetness and charm."[90]

Another important contrast between the acting in the two productions is the matter of focus. Poel continually stressed the importance of the play itself, and not individual characters. As Robert Speaight points out, "Poel believed that criticism had gone astray in concentrating too exclusively on the character of Hamlet himself, to the neglect of his environment."[91] Evidently, Forbes Robertson's presence and reputation called more attention to the character of Hamlet in Baker's production. "The audience. . . followed the performance closely, absorbedly when Mr. Robertson was on the stage, and many persons returned on the second evening, contented to stand when seats could not be had."[92] This emphasis upon the leading actor was one of the inevitable results of a professional as opposed to an amateur cast, especially at the turn of the century when star performers were so popular. Poel was

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[90]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 298.

[91]Speaight, p. 56.

[92]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 298.

certainly against any effort on the part of an acting company, to focus attention on a leading player, unless called for in the text. He was also opposed to the editing of scenes so that the actor might get applause on his exit or at the end of a speech. According to Poel, this encouraged the actor to make his points with exaggerated emphasis, thus distorting the play and delaying its progress. Evidently Poel's Hamlet did not suffer from too much applause, although there are indications that Baker's production may have been delayed by audience response. As Baker states in his discussion of the play,

> The audience on the first night - there was standing-room only both nights in this building with some 1000 seats - was one of the most distinguished ever gathered in Sanders Theatre. . . . On the second evening, the audience fairly shouted its delight after some of Mr. Robertson's best scenes, something very unusual with university audiences, which are exceedingly undemonstrative as a rule.[93]

In spite of intervals caused by applause, however, there are other indications that Mr. Robertson's Hamlet was much more in tune with Mr. Poel's concepts. Forbes Robertson was more concerned with Hamlet as a play than as a starring vehicle. He was certainly interested in its historic traditions. His consent to perform Harvard's Elizabethan version stands as evidence. Although Baker also sought less emphasis upon the character of Hamlet and maintained an objective of ensemble acting, it must be remembered that he had another, perhaps more pressing objective in mind: the acceptance of a theatrical event within the university community, and he recognized the

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[93]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 298.

reputation of Forbes Robertson as an asset. It should be noted also that Elizabethan companies, which were themselves comprised of professional actors, often had popular, "leading" players such as Will Kempe and Richard Burbage, and in this respect Baker's company was in fact more Elizabethan than Poel's.

It would be unfair and perhaps impossible to compare the two portrayals of Hamlet, one by Richard Hoodless, an inexperienced amateur, and that of Johnston Forbes Robertson, one of the leading actors of his day. The "lack of subtlety" and "tragic gloom," which according to one critic characterized Mr. Hoodless's performance, were simply the marks of a young amateur, and Poel even considered the inexperience and awkwardness of his young actor an advantage in some respects. For example, regarding Hamlet's encounter with the Ghost, Poel states, "One can hardly read the authorized text (First Quarto) without feeling that Hamlet is here shown as a young man, or perhaps a 'boy,' as his mother calls him in the First Quarto, thrown into the intensest excitement. His delicate, nervous temperament has undergone a terrible shock from the interview with the Ghost, yet. . . our Hamlets on the stage finish this scene with the most dignified composure."[94] Poel also stated that "our stage Hamlets try to tone down the inconsistencies and imperfections of the character; they exploit his sentiments, but do not show his inclinations."[95] Perhaps Poel felt that the imperfections of Hamlet's character could best be shown

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[94]Poel, p. 161.

[95]Ibid., p. 169.

by an inexperienced actor who was not concerned with polishing his performance. It is possible, however, that a professional company could have successfully incorporated Poel's objectives without calling attention to the mechanics of his system of tones.

Forbes Robertson's rendition, which had been praised in several countries before his appearance at Harvard, was described by Baker as a "delicately conceived and deftly presented characterization."[96] He considered the portrait to be subtle, graceful, and charming.[97] Shaw voiced a similar opinion.

> Mr. Forbes Robertson's own performance has a continuous charm, interest and variety which are the result not only of his well-known familiar grace and accomplishment as an actor, but of a genuine delight - the rarest thing on our stage - in Shakespeare's art, and a natural familiarity with the plane of his imagination. He does not superstitiously worship William: he enjoys him and understands his methods of expression. . . . He does not utter half a line; then stop to act; then go on with another half line; and then stop to act again, with the clock running away with Shakespeare's chances all the time. He plays as Shakespeare should be played, on the line and to the line, with the utterance and acting simultaneous, inseparable and in fact identical.[98]

The two Hamlets were perhaps most alike in their presentation of an Elizabethan prince. Poel believed that "there would have been nothing mysterious about Hamlet to the

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[96]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 298.

[97]Ibid.

[98]Shaw, Dramatic Opinions and Essays, II, p. 324.

Elizabethan mind because he could have been seen daily at Elizabeth's court,"[99] and Robertson's Hamlet was often referred to as a gentlemanly Elizabethan prince.[100] It must be remembered that Poel and Robertson were both key figures in the Shakespearean reform at the turn of the century and shared many similar ideas. In his book, Shakespeare on the English Stage, J. C. Trewin comments on the 1902 theatrical season in London, and speaks of William Poel "in active middle age," and Johnston Forbes Robertson as two of the driving forces behind "a changing stage" and "a new Shakespeare."[101] Trewin also considered the eminent actor to be the "Hamlet of his generation: an almost ideal sweet prince, if with a certain stained-glass air that Forbes Robertson could never entirely lose."[102]

There were other similarities between the two Hamlets. Both were portrayed as being quite sane. In fact, there were those who questioned whether Forbes Robertson's "amazingly sane scholar-prince" was indeed Shakespeare's.[103] In response to the proverbial question as to whether Hamlet was mad, Poel replied,

> If Hamlet is mad, who in the play is saner? Certainly not the King who is a murderer; nor the Queen who is an adultress in intention if not in

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[99]Speaight, p. 56.

[100]A. C. Sprague, Shakespeare and the Actors (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), p. 133.

[101]Trewin, p. 20.

[102]Ibid., p. 22.

[103]Styan, pp. 51-52.

> deed; nor the senile Polonius; nor the brainless Ophelia; nor her boastful brother! There is only left Horatio who, not being passion's slave, looked on life calmly and probably with indifference. Every honest soul who is as sensitive and as emotional as Hamlet is liable to be considered mad.[104]

Baker and Poel made sure that the acting in their productions, both professional and non-professional, focused upon the story of the play rather than individual characters or performers. For Poel, it was a domestic rather than historical tragedy, but he avoided delving into complex characterizations with his actors. "Hamlet was a drama of revenge before it was a puzzle in psychology."[105] In summation of his thoughts on Hamlet, Baker stated that the focus of the production was first on the story, then on the actors. "This revival showed too, what all such revivals have shown, that the old comedies and tragedies gain when freed from modern setting. Everything on the Elizabethan stage centered attention on the actor as the exponent of the dramatist's ideas: it focussed where we dissipate; it subordinated everything to the play itself."[106]

Audience

The audiences for the two productions of Hamlet were quite different. According to Baker, the Harvard audience was "purely academic,"[107] while Poel's, though open to the general public,

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[104]Speaight, p. 55.

[105]Ibid., p. 56.

[106]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 301.

[107]Ibid., p. 296.

consisted mainly of the curious-minded as well as a few sympathetic to the revivalist cause. Sanders Theatre, which has a seating capacity of approximately one thousand, was filled with standing room only for both night's performances. Baker comments that it was one of the most distinguished audiences ever gathered in Sanders.[108] The Carpenters' Hall performance of one night only, was probably sparsely attended. All indications are that most productions by the Elizabethan Stage Society lacked public support. Shaw described the audience for Poel's recital of Romeo and Juliet in 1895. "I sat at it with Mr. Granville-Barker. I forget who else was in the house. I think there were about six people."[109] And in 1898 Shaw stated,

> To anyone who knows the thousand impossibilities of the enterprise it will seem that Mr. Poel must be an extraordinary able man to run such a forlorn hope for less than 225 pounds a year net loss; but he can hardly be expected to continue to endow the public at this rate in return for the enthusiast's usual tribute of misunderstanding and ridicule. . . and though I know how few people, especially among the stage-struck, have either the desire or the capacity for learning anything whatsoever of an artistic nature, I mention the fact on the chance of directing a grain or two of the public spirit of art in Mr. Poel's direction.[110]

In their efforts to recreate the Elizabethan experience more completely, Baker and Poel both added other audience members, clad in appropriate Elizabethan costumes. Evidently,

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[108]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 298.

[109]George Bernard Shaw, "Mr. Shaw on the Staging of Shakespeare," Pall Mall Gazette, 2 December 1912, p. 2.

[110]Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties, III, p. 363.

their participation was more carefully rehearsed at Harvard. Baker describes their contribution.

> When the audience was seated, Elizabethans - some fifty Harvard students - came in, singly or in groups, with appropriate business. There were prentices, citizens, a ballad-seller, program-vendors, ticket-takers, sellers of stools, cast captains, a few women, gallants, and pages. The last two groups made their way to the stage and the boxes. Though they were allowed to use the stage between the acts, they did not sit on it during the performance, lest amid all the new conditions for Mr. Robertson's company this be the one touch too much. Each member of the Elizabethans had his own bit of acting to do, and he had been taught to keep in his part throughout the evening, though all were to subordinate themselves to the play when it was in progress. It took some fifteen minutes for this audience to play itself into its groupings in the pit and the boxes, and something less to play its way out at the end of the performance.[111]

In contrast, Poel's "Elizabethans" remained on stage throughout the performance, as was the custom with most revivals of the Society. They, too, were advised to remain attentive, however, and conduct themselves with propriety; evidently their behavior was a little too tame for William Archer, who described their effect during an earlier Poel production.

> The gallants, smoking their Elizabethan clay pipes on their sixpenny stools on the stage, certainly contributed to the illusion; but I fear it was very seldom that the ruffling blades of the Court and the Inns of Court conducted themselves with such propriety. To make the realism perfect they should have called for and consumed burnt sack in the midst of the performance, exchanged banter with the citizens in the "yard," and betweenwhiles quarrelled among themselves. It would not have been amiss if one of them had casually run another through the body.[112]

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[111] Baker, Jahrbuch, p. 298.

[112] William Archer, The Theatrical World for 1893 (London: Walter Scott, Ltd., 1894), p. 268.

The overall effect in both cases was unlike that in an actual Elizabethan playhouse. The separation between the "regular" audience and the "staged" audience must have been evident. In Poel's case, the division was heightened by the presence of a proscenium arch, and Baker even comments that at Harvard "the modern audience looked across the Elizabethan pit to an Elizabethan stage."[113] Archer states that, although the effect was interesting, it was somehow incomplete, and the following description is perhaps accurate for the audience situation at both productions. "The effect was so picturesque and interesting that I beg to repeat in earnest a proposal which was freely mooted in jest - to wit, that the picture should be completed by the audience, too, appearing in ruffs and farthingales. The black coats and white neckties were deplorably discordant."[114]

Although both directors insisted that the "Elizabethans" focus attention on the action of the play, there is an important distinction in the reasoning behind their presence for Baker and Poel. Poel wished the mock-Elizabethans to somehow enhance the Elizabethan performance; his objection to their participation was not strongly urged. Baker, on the other hand, used the costumed students to add a final touch in his picture of an Elizabethan theatre.

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[113]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 298.

[114]William Archer, The Theatrical World of 1895 (London: Walter Scott, Ltd., 1896), p. 373.

This section has dealt primarily with the composition and appearance of the audiences. The reaction by the audiences to the productions themselves, as well as professional critical response is discussed in the following section.

Critical Response

Any comparison of the critical response to the two productions of Hamlet must also distinguish between the circumstances of the productions. Both were experiments in Elizabethan staging performed for an audience, however, Poel's was given for the general public and therefore invited public as well as professional criticism. Baker's, on the other hand, was presented to a university community and carried with it the atmosphere of an academic exercise. As such, it was not reviewed, and response to the performance is based upon the director's assessments and previous comments on the Forbes Robertson production. Both productions, however, received commentary which was both favorable and unfavorable.

By 1900, the London Times was beginning to make a few positive statements about the work of the Elizabethan Stage Society. Most of the review of Hamlet was spent debating the merits of the First Quarto, and when the reviewer did get around to the actual production, the comments were ambiguous, especially in regard to the acting. After denouncing the jumbled version of the text, the reviewer stated,

> . . . and the actors did not make it any better by showing that some of them had not a very close acquaintance with their parts. Still, the performance was interesting - how could anything like an intelligent performance of Hamlet

> fail to be interesting? - and, considering that a scratch company had got it up for one night only, it was quite creditable.[115]

Although acquaintance with their parts was never in question, the Forbes Robertson company was checked for some unprofessional behavior which caught the professional eye of critic George Bernard Shaw during a London performance. "The courtiers should be taught how flatteringly courtiers listen when a king shows off his wisdom in wise speeches to his nephew."[116] Baker also comments that the newness of the playing conditions at Harvard made the professional company somewhat uneasy. "The first night the novelty of the conditions somewhat disturbed the company of Mr. Robertson, but it acquitted itself well."[117]

It must be remembered that both directors sought an emphasis upon Shakespeare's story as opposed to any one aspect of the production. The comments made by Poel's reviewer concerning the text indicate that this was to some extent achieved, and in spite of Baker's statement that the audience followed the story more "absorbedly when Mr. Robertson was on the stage,"[118] there are indications that Robertson himself sought first to illuminate Shakespeare's story. As Shaw pointed out, "it is wonderful how easily everything comes right when you have the right man with the right mind for it - how the story

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[115] Times (London), 22 February 1900, p. 7.

[116] Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties, III, p. 207.

[117] Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 298.

[118] Ibid.

tells itself, how the characters come to life."[119] Shaw also compared Robertson's performance with previous renditions, and in particular, that of Henry Irving. He considered Robertson's version to be a strong link in the process toward a revival of Shakespeare.

> There is none of that strange Lyceum intensity which comes from the perpetual struggle between Sir Henry Irving and Shakespeare. The lines help Mr. Forbes Robertson instead of getting in his way at every turn, because he wants to play Hamlet, and not to slip into his inky cloak a changeling of quite another race. We may miss the craft, the skill double-distilled by constant peril, the subtlety, the dark rays of heat generated by intense friction, the relentless parental tenacity and cunning with which Sir Henry nurses his own pet creations on Shakespearean food like a fox rearing its litter in the den of a lioness; but we get light, freedom, naturalness, credibility, and Shakespeare.[120]

Shaw also prophesied concerning Forbes Robertson's treatment of Shakespeare.

> The effect of this success. . . makes it almost probable that we shall presently find managers vying with each other in offering the public as much of the original Shakespearean stuff as possible, instead of, as heretofore, doing their utmost to reassure us that everything that the most modern resources can do to relieve the irreducible minimum of tedium inseparable from even the most heavily cut acting version will be lavished on their revivals.[121]

The audience response to the two productions was quite different. The response to Poel's production in 1900 was very much like the reaction to his Hamlet of 1881, where the

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[119]Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties, III, pp. 203-204.

[120]Ibid., p. 203.

[121]Ibid., pp. 200-201.

attitude of the general audience was one of "apathy" with a "disposition to deride."[122] Although the review indicates that the audience had progressed from finding the production "wearisome and depressing" to finding it "interesting," their response stands in contrast to Harvard's, which "fairly shouted its delight."

An overall comparison of the response to both productions of Hamlet indicates that Baker's was more favorably recieved; his was a professional company, however, and was not subjected to professional criticism. Although the general tone of Poel's review was somewhat scornful, it must be remembered that the response was far more auspicious than reviews of his past productions. Critical response was beginning to favor the methods of both Poel and Baker.

It is difficult to evaluate the success or failure of either production without an understanding of the motivations and objectives of each director, and it is also difficult to isolate one production for such an evaluation; the work of each man must be considered collectively rather than individually. The purpose of this dissertation is not to evaluate the productions of Baker and Poel, however, an examination of their work in Elizabethan staging, in view of their motivations and objectives, leads to several conclusions.

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[122]Cook, Nights at the Play, II, p. 316.

Figure 1

George Pierce Baker, 23 February 1920. Wisner Payne Kinne, George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. ii.

Figure 1.

Figure 2

William Poel, around 1900. William Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1913), p. ii.

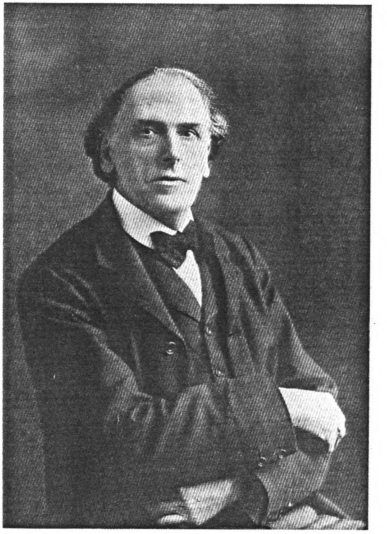


Figure 2.

Figure 3

Program cover for Poel's Hamlet, 1900, Carpenters' Hall. (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.)

Programme Twopence.

THE

Elizabethan Stage Society.

FIFTH SEASON.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21st, 1900.

SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY;

"HAMLET,"

acted from the first published quarto of the play in 1603, on an Elizabethan Stage after the manner of the period in the

CARPENTERS' HALL,

LONDON,

By kind permission of the Worshipful Master, Wardens, and Court of the Company,

At 8.30 o'clock.

DIRECTOR - - - - MR. WILLIAM POEL.

God Save the Queen.

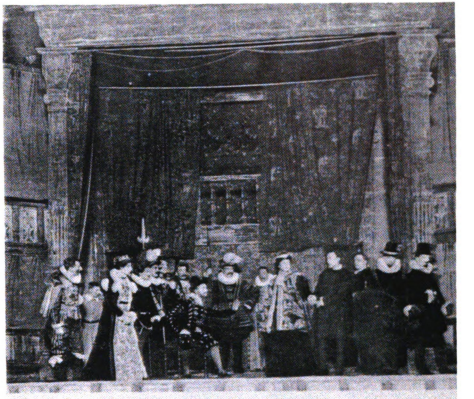
Figure 3.

Figure 4

A scene from the First Quarto Hamlet on Poel's Elizabethan stage. (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.)

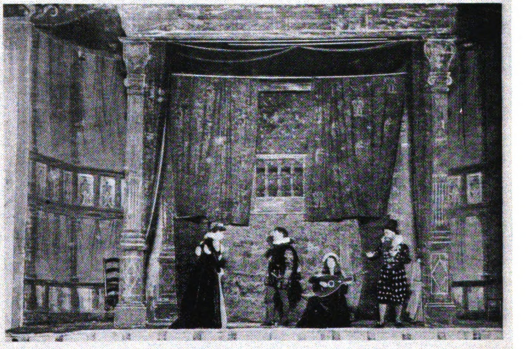
Figure 5

A scene from Poel's Hamlet, 1900. Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, Hamlet Through the Ages (London: Rockliff, 1955), p. 115.



A SCENE FROM THE FIRST QUARTO *HAMLET* ON POEL'S ELIZABETHAN STAGE

Figure 4.



183 London, *c.* 1900. A William Poel production of Hamlet on an Elizabethan stage, with an all male cast.

Figure 5.

Figure 6

Program for Harvard's Hamlet with Forbes Robertson, 1904. Wisner Payne Kinne, George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 48.

Harvard University Sanders Theatre

APRIL 5 & 6, 1904

The TRAGEDIE *of*

HAMLET

PRINCE OF DENMARKE

By VVilliam Shake-ſpeare

As it hath been ſundrie times publikely acted by the right honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his ſeruants

The Names of the Actors:

CLAVDIVS, *King of Denmarke*	Ian Robertſon
HAMLET, *ſon to the late, nephew to the preſent* King	Forbes Robertſon
FORTINBRAS, *Prince of Norway*	VVeſt Drayton
POLONIVS, *Lord Chamberlaine*	Guy Lane
HORATIO, *friend to Hamlet*	Arthur Harrold
LAERTES, *ſon to Polonius*	Leon Quartermaine
ROSENCRANCE, GVILDENSTERNE, OSRICKE, *Courtiers*	N. Howard, F. Bickley, H. Beaumont
A PRIEST	Morton Bennett
MARCELLVS, BERNARDO, *Officers*	J. R. Ryan, Leonard Howe
FRANCISCO, *a ſoldier*	C. Kinnaird
REYNOLDO, *ſeruant to Polonius*	S. Macdonald
FIRST PLAYER	James J. Ryan
SECOND PLAYER	S. T. Pearce
FIRST GRAVE-DIGGER	Erneſt Cofham
SECOND GRAVE-DIGGER	S. Thompſon
GHOST OF HAMLET'S FATHER	C. Aubrey Smith
PLAYER QVEENE	Auriol Lee
GERTRVDE, *Queene of Denmarke, Mother to Hamlet*	Jennie A. Euſtace
OPHELIA, *daughter to Polonius*	Gertrude Elliott

Lords, Ladies, Soldiers, Sailors, Meſſengers, and other Attendants

Scene — Elſinore

HTC

Programme, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson's *Hamlet*, 1904

Figure 6.

Figure 7

The Harvard Elizabethan stage, with the curtains drawn. Shakespeare Jahrbuch XLI (1905), p. 297.

Figure 8

The Harvard stage with student actors and "Elizabethans." George Pierce Baker, The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist (New York: The Macmillan Co., Ltd., 1907), p. 250.

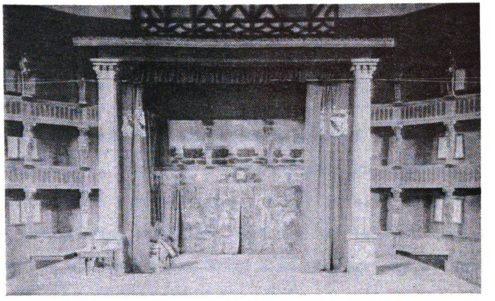


Figure 7.

THE STAGE USED FOR REVIVALS OF ELIZABETHAN PLAYS AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Figure 8.

CONCLUSIONS

The Elizabethan staging techniques of George Pierce Baker and William Poel provide a basic comparison from which certain conclusions can be drawn. First of all, their methods affirm the growing reaction, both in America and England, against the elaborate and distorted productions of Shakespeare in the late nineteenth century. The comparison reveals that the techniques of the two men, although remarkably similar, were motivated for different reasons and with different objectives. It concludes that the objectives of the men, one primarily a scholar, the other a theatre practitioner, significantly affected their work as produced. Finally, the comparison serves to illustrate the advantages of a collaborative effort between actor and scholar in the production of Shakespeare's plays.

Baker and Poel had similar ideas about the staging of Elizabethan plays. They both advocated a return to the original texts, emphasized the story as interpreted by the actors, and sought the use of a platform stage, which according to both men, promoted a continuity of action, a lively pace, and an intimate relationship between actor and audience. However, their career objectives affected their work as produced and yielded different results.

As a theatre practitioner, Poel was concerned with the performance of the play in the Elizabethan manner. He concentrated on the communication between actor and audience. It must be remembered that until very late in his career, Poel was working without a true platform stage, and it is only natural that his attention turned to the interpretation of the play by the actors.

Poel's objective to faithfully recreate an Elizabethan performance was often considered too severe. He was labeled a fanatic in his strict adherence to "the Elizabethan manner," and his technique was described as "Elizabethan Methodism."[1] Throughout his career, however, Poel was forced to make compromises, and he often made decisions which were a strange antithesis of his original objectives. For example, he often cast women in men's roles, and would costume certain plays with a bizarre mixture of periods and styles. Much of the criticism of Poel, especially later in his career, was directed more at his eccentricities than his Elizabethan methodism.

Poel was also criticized for being too erudite, but his objective was far from pedantic. Although he wished to educate his audience to a new way with Shakespeare, he expected the experience to be a pleasurable one; and for many sympathetic souls in the audience, like Shaw for example, it proved as entertaining as it was novel. "From these simple recitals, without cuts, waits or scenery, and therefore without those departures from the conditions contemplated by the poet which

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[1]Speaight, Shakespeare on the Stage, p. 132.

are inevitable in a modern theatre, I learn a good deal about the plays which I could learn in no other way. What is more, I enjoy myself."[2] However, for many in the audience, the revivals were merely "interesting," as indicated by the review of Hamlet, and the productions soon reflected the lack of public support. In 1927 Drinkwater wrote, "Mr. William Poel, a really great man of the theatre, finds that he is not wanted, and is reduced to giving hole-and-corner performances at long intervals with wholly inadequate resources and practically no public support."[3] Poel's objectives as a theatre practitioner, therefore, affected his work as produced, and yet not until well into the twentieth century was it realized, the contributions he had made.

Baker's objectives also affected his work in Elizabethan staging. As a theatre scholar, Baker was more concerned with the structure of the Elizabethan theatre experience. His energy was not always directed at the interpretation of the play by the actors. It must be remembered that in the revival of Epicoene in 1895 as well as the Hamlet of 1904, Baker was working with companies outside the university, actors with preconceived interpretations of the plays. Baker's work, therefore, was devoted to the creation of the form and structure of the Elizabethan theatre. He sought to create the

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[2]Speaight, William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival, p. 72.

[3]Drinkwater, The Art of Theatre-going (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927), p. 43.

atmosphere of the Elizabethan experience which a previously mounted production could complete.

Baker also expected the Elizabethan productions to be a learning experience for both actors and audience. His platform stage was often a testing ground for students. His objective of a "literary laboratory for the testing of ideas," is evident in his staging of Epicoene. Baker viewed the production as providing an exercise for "students of the drama in general and the Elizabethan drama in particular," and stated that "the play showed how little any but the simplest setting is needed in most plays."[4] Baker summarized the conclusions of the experiment. "They do not believe in curtains before 1616, for they could not have been possible on a stage like that of the Swan. How the scenes and acts were indicated, what the backing of the balcony was, just where the fops and pages sat, all these are clearer."[5] In spite of his scholarly approach, however, Baker was not always concerned with the authenticity of technical details, as his Hamlet reveals. He defended his use of side curtains as practical rather than historical realities, and stated that the most important result of the experiment was not the technicalities of curtain management. "It was the freedom of the production from the trammels of the proscenium stage and the stifling enclosure of the box

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[4]Baker, "The Revival of Ben Jonson's Epicoene," Harvard Graduates' Magazine, p. 500.

[5]Ibid., pp. 500-501.

set at the same time that it achieved the dramatic values of those very devices."[6]

It is possible that there were other, more essential differences in the objectives of Baker and Poel, which in turn affected their work as produced. It has been suggested that Poel's staging was presented in the interest of histrionic reform, whereas Baker's was more archaeological in nature.

> A great deal of activity has gone in recent years towards the rediscovery of Shakespeare as a stagecraftsman, and. . . many attempts have been made to reconstruct a Shakespearean stage and to remodel histrionic methods . . . . The English Elizabethan Society, under the direction of Mr. William Poel, initiated its Shakespearean stage with a performance of Measure for Measure in 1893, and endured until 1905. In America, the Department of English of Harvard University built an Elizabethan stage for a revival of Ben Jonson's Epicoene in 1895, and rebuilt it in accordance with the latest research for Mr. Forbes Robertson to play Hamlet upon in 1904. It must, of course, be borne in mind that these ventures, with the possible exception of the Harvard one, were conceived in the interests of histrionic reform rather than in those of pure archaeology. The objects are related, but ought not to be confused.[7]

Although this distinction is not always valid, there is some truth in the statement, and in many ways describes the productions of Hamlet. Baker, after all, presented the play on a reproduction of the Elizabethan stage for an academic audience, and he stated that "one purpose in giving the performance was to experiment with the various theories."[8] He concluded that "Consequently,. . . the performances threw

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[6]Kinne, p. 65.

[7]Huntly Carter, The New Spirit in Drama and Art (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1913), pp. 139-140.

[8]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 298.

much light on recently much mooted questions as to the characteristics of that stage."[9] This emphasis upon the structural components of the stage indicates a largely archaeological objective.

With Poel, the emphasis in Hamlet was on the performance in relation to its audience. The fact that he was working with an amateur cast made it necessary for Poel to spend more time creating his ensemble as well as teaching his system of tones. If indeed Poel's objective was histrionic reform, then his production was seminal. Robert Speaight states that "many, but not all, of Poel's ideas on Hamlet have now been adopted by theatrical custom; it is important, however, to see how he arrived at them. . . . He arrived at them by the simple expedient of reading the play. Instead of saying: 'This is where we want a big effect,' he sat down and tried to find out what effect a literal fidelity to Shakespeare would produce. He was not interested in big effects; he was only interested in effects that were significant."[10] His concern with effects in the script indicates an emphasis upon the performance of the play as opposed to its physical surroundings.

A summary of the results of both productions in relation to their objectives reveals that in Baker's Hamlet, the emphasis was on the creation of an Elizabethan theatre experience for the academic audience, whereas for Poel, the emphasis was more upon the performance of the play in the Elizabethan manner.

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[9]Baker, Shakespeare Jahrbuch, p. 296.

[10]Speaight, p. 57.

In spite of these differing objectives as scholar and theatre practitioner, however, each man recognized the importance of the other and the advantages of a collaborative effort between theatre and scholarship.

The various methods of staging Elizabethan plays which have been explored in the past, from the scenic spectacles of the nineteenth century to the reformations and experimentations of the twentieth, have all been attempts to discover what has been referred to as "the right way with Shakespeare."[11] There has been more scholarly research and theatrical experimentation in recent years than ever before, and yet, more often than not, artist and scholar are working at odds. Without the services of the other, however, each is liable to make little progress.

In his Prefaces to Shakespeare, Granville-Barker states that "the scholar, at best, will be in the case of a man reading the score of a symphony, humming the themes. He may study and re-study a play, and ever find something new. . . yet who will not confess with me that at any performance some quite unsuspected effect (unsuspected often by the interpreters themselves) may suddenly glow into life before him?"[12] Likewise, the actor is in need of the scholar.

> The theatre, even the ideal theatre of our dreams, cannot claim a monopoly of Shakespeare. He has passed beyond the charmed circle of the art he served, and those disgracefully printed little quartos of his plays

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[11]Styan, The Shakespeare Revolution, p. 47.

[12]Granville-Barker, "From 'Henry V' to 'Hamlet'" Aspects of Shakespeare, pp. 81-82.

> which he himself took no interest in and probably utterly despised have proved the first-fruits of a line of printed texts which as far as eye can see, will stretch out till the crack o' doom. And so the reader has his rights in Shakespeare as well as actor and spectator, rights too which must be respected.[13]

A collaborative effort between artist and scholar is essential in the quest for the right way with Shakespeare. In 1927, John Drinkwater stated that "cooperation between the theatre and scholarship has done much in the past twenty years to raise the standard,"[14] and the statement would be particularly true today. The foundations for this kind of collaboration were laid at the turn of the century, and through the Elizabethan staging of Baker and Poel, we recognize the value of a cooperation between theatre and scholarship.

As a man of the theatre deeply involved in an active production schedule, William Poel recognized the usefulness of the scholar. He felt that the collaborative effort should begin in the preliminary stages of production, especially in matters of text. "An attempt should be made to standardize stage-versions of Shakespeare's most popular plays, and these stage-versions should be the joint work of scholars and actors."[15] Poel was emphatic that the study of dramatic construction should begin with original texts.

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[13]J. Dover Wilson, "The Elizabethan Shakespeare," Aspects of Shakespeare, edited by J. W. Mackail (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 216.

[14]John Drinkwater, The Art of Theatre-going, p. 32.

[15]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 60.

> It is indeed to be regretted that no scholar nor actor has thought it necessary to study the art of Shakespeare's dramatic construction from the original copies. Some of our University men have written intelligently about Shakespeare's characters and his philosophy, and one of them has done something more than this. But it is doubtful if any serious attention has been given yet to the way Shakespeare conducts his story and brings his characters on and off the stage, a matter of the highest moment, since the very life of the play depends upon the skill with which this is done.[16]

It was Poel's belief that acting editions are worth consulting, but only in relation to the authentic copies.

> The acting-editions of Shakespeare's plays are worth examining by student in order to ascertain how far they are consistent with the author's intention. Since the chronological order of the plays has been fixed with more or less certainty, the study of Shakespeare has become much easier, and his dramatic and poetical conceptions are more accurately realized than they ever were before. The time has come when our acting-editions could be profitably revised. Eminent actors may prefer, perhaps, arranging versions from their own study of the text, but there must always exist a standard version for general use in the profession. I should like to see existing a playbook of "Hamlet" which has been altered and shortened by a joint board of actors and scholars.[17]

This, in essence, is what occurred in the collaboration between Baker and Forbes Robertson during the Harvard Hamlet.

As a professor of dramatic literature, Baker was well aware of the interpretation of that literature by the creative artist. His emphasis was always upon the play as produced and consistently urged a vision of the script as interpreted by actors, especially in the study of Shakespeare. "A slight

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[16]Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 122.

[17]Ibid., p. 175.

tendency in the last few years to produce plays less elaborately, to let the play depend more on its text and the actors who interpret it, is but a return to that stage which gave us the best drama that we have ever had and which affected advantageously the work of Shakespeare himself."[18] He further stated that "the plays of any period can be judged accurately only under the stage conditions for which they were written."[19] Baker's engagement of Forbes Robertson to perform for the academic community is the best example of his understanding of the value in an actor-scholar collaboration. "After all, the drama is a collaborative art, and no role - even Hamlet or Lear - is seen at its best till an actor of such sensitiveness and matured technique plays it that not merely what the text obviously says but its slightest implications are revealed."[20]

Theatre as a collaborative effort occupied much of Baker's attention. The organization of his 47 Workshop attests to this fact. In his Introduction to the first volume of Harvard Plays, he discusses the principal concepts of the workshop. "Anyone who believes he has ability in any of the arts connected with the theatre - acting, scene or costume designing, lighting, directing, or playwrighting - may here prove his quality."[21]

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[18]Baker, The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, p. 308.

[19]Ibid., pp. 308-309.

[20]Baker, Modern American Plays, edited by George P. Baker (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), Introduction, p. v.

[21]Baker, Harvard Plays, p. vii.

He also confirms a strong commitment to the author on the part of all creative artists. But perhaps Baker's understanding of the relationship between theatre and scholarship was most evident in his realization that the future of American drama was linked with that of the university, and that the education of American audiences was a function of the university community. Baker posed questions which influenced the course of both education and theatre.

> Shall we have in the schools, in the universities stood for the best possibilities of the drama, treating it as an art? Shall we so manage that twenty-five years hence, looking back over what many of us hope may in that time develop a genuine American drama, we may claim this product as in part at least a glorious sign that here in America our colleges and universities are not the "homes of lost causes" but places in closest touch with the most vivid interests of the people at large and so guiding and developing them that always in our best products of our national life the stamps of our universities are visible?[22]

These examples, therefore, provide evidence that each man recognized an importance in the partnership of theatre and scholarship. Each man, however, possessed traits of both theatre practitioner and scholar. It was this combination of traits and perspectives which enabled each man to empathize with the objectives of the other. Baker and Poel had special gifts which enabled them to perceive the Elizabethan stage, and indeed the art of theatre, from an original perspective. Their contributions were unique and yet complimentary. As J. L. Styan points out,

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[22]Kinne, p. 72.

> . . . both actor and scholar can render only what their sense of the dramatic medium will allow, for they see what they interpret before they interpret what they see. Their Shakespeare originates in the mind, in their reactions to Shakespeare rather than in Shakespeare himself. But as the style and idiom of their interpretation gain currency in each other's eyes, so they must with audiences and readers. Actor and scholar will teach each other, not what Shakespeare means, but what his possibilities are beyond logic. Nor will these be exhausted. The scholar will modify the actor's illumination, the actor will modify the scholar's, a process of infinite adjustment. Shakespeare remains uncharted territory waiting to be explored and articulated. But the object of all this earnest endeavor, the experience in some degree of Shakespeare's greater vision, cannot be reached without the humble services of both parties.[23]

George Pierce Baker and William Poel have helped audiences experience that vision, and their pioneer work in the techniques of Elizabethan staging, has advanced our perception of the right way with Shakespeare.

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[23]Styan, p. 237.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Further studies in connection with this dissertation might include research into the influence of both Baker and Poel on modern Shakespearean production: Poel's influence upon the performance of Shakespeare in the twentieth century, and Baker's influence upon the structure of today's Elizabethan theatre experience. Topics for investigation might also include the influence of Shakespearean reform on the physical structure of today's theatre.

For further study of George Pierce Baker, see Wisner Payne Kinne's George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre, and Baker's The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist. More information on William Poel can be found in Robert Speaight's William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival and Poel's work, Shakespeare in the Theatre.

For research into modern Shakespearean production, see Robert Speaight's Shakespeare on the Stage, and J. L. Styan's Shakespeare Stagecraft and The Shakespeare Revolution: Criticism and Performance in the Twentieth Century.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE CAREERS OF BAKER AND POEL AND THEIR ACTIVITIES IN ELIZABETHAN STAGING

George Pierce Baker	Year	William Poel
	1852	Born July 22, 1852, Westminster, England
Born April 4, 1866, Providence, RI	1866	
Attended Mowry and Goff's School	1877	Saw Irving as Richard III
	1881	Staged Hamlet, 1Q, St. George's Hall, 16 April
Entered Harvard	1883	Mgr., Royal Victoria Hall (Old Vic), '81-'83
Saw Irving as Shylock, Booth as Lear	1884	Stage Mgr., F. R. Benson's Company
Irving lectures at Harvard, 30 March	1885	Formed "Little Comedies" Company
Editor, Harvard Monthly; Graduated May	1887	Instructor, Shakespeare Reading Society '87-'97
English Instructor, Harvard	1888	Directed dramatic reading, Romeo & Juliet
London, summer & fall	1891	Costume recital, Measure for Measure, 16 November
Specimens of Argumentation published	1893	M for M, Eliz. stage, Royalty Theatre, 9 November
Edition of Lyly's Endymion	1894	Founded Eliz. Stage Society, '95-'05
Principle's of Argumentation pub.	1895	Twelfth Night, Burlington Hall, 21 June
Eliz. stage for Epicoene, Sanders, 20 March		Comedy of Errors, Gray's Inn Hall, 6 December
Edition of Midsummer Night's Dream	1897	The Tempest, Mansion House, 5 Nov.
Lectures, "London Theatres, 16th Century," 16 March	1899	"English Playhouse, 16th Century" March 9, 16, 23
		Richard II with Granville-Barker, 11 November
Eng. 39, Course in Contemporary Drama	1900	1Q Hamlet, Carpenters' Hall, 21 Feb
London Theatre Tour	1901	Produced Everyman, 13 July
		Henry V, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 23 October
Invited Forbes Robertson to Harvard	1903	Staged Marlowe's Edward II, 10 August

George Pierce Baker	Year	William Poel
Staged Eliz. Hamlet, Harvard, 5 & 6 April	1904	Much Ado for London School Board, 23 February - 22 April
Professorship, "Hamlet on Eliz. Stage"	1905	R & J, last production of Stage Society, 5 May
Hyde Lectureship, Sorbonne	1906	Acted Keegan, Shaw's John Bull's Other Island
Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist	1907	Merchant of Venice, Fulham Theatre 11 June
"Bibliographical Puzzles in Eliz. Quartos"	1910	Two Gents for Tree's Shakespeare Festival, 20 April
Tours Eur. theatres, Granville-Barker's WT	1912	Troilus & Cressida with Edith Evans, 10 December
47 Workshop est., edition of Hamlet	1913	Staged Garnett's Trial of Jeanne d'Arc
O'Neill's Bound East for Cardiff pub	1916	Lecture tour in U.S., 1916-17
Dramatic Technique published	1919	Return from Parnassus & Comedy of Errors, 3 June
Appointed Director, Yale Drama Dept.	1924	Produced Fratricide Punished, 11 Oct.
Yale Univ. Theatre opens, Patriarch, 10 February	1927	Eliz. Stage Circle formed
Staged Winter's Tale, Yale, 30 March	1931	Coriolanus (platform stage) 11 May
Retired	1933	Confined to his bed
Chairman, Nat'l Theatre Conference, Yale	1934	Died 13 December, 1934
Died 6 January, 1935	1935	

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