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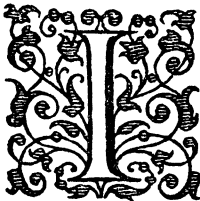
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# On the Elizabethan Staging of *Hamlet*

HERBERT E. CHILDS

N 1961 the twenty-first season of the Oregon Shakespearean Festival at Ashland consisted of ten performances each of *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*; nine performances of *1 Henry IV*; and three of Jonson's *The Alchemist*. Founded in 1935, the Oregon Festival was the first North American theater to perform Shakespeare's plays consistently in the Elizabethan manner. Before 1959 relatively few playgoers from other parts of the United States had heard of the Festival, probably because of what to many may seem to be a remote location in extreme southern Oregon. Nevertheless Ashland is now an important center for the performance and study of Shakespeare's plays. The Festival draws its audiences from all the western States and its company from all parts of the United States, from Canada, and from England. Among other functions, the Festival is partly a teaching theater. Most of the company are advanced students or teachers of drama from many universities.

The present Festival theater structure, the third on this site, was built in 1959 at a cost of approximately \$275,000.<sup>1</sup> It may be the best equipped strictly Elizabethan playhouse in the world. The more one studies the theater and the performances there, the more one gets the impression that the structure is somewhat larger than life and that Shakespeare, Burbage, and company would be both delighted and somewhat overwhelmed if they were given the opportunity to perform in it.

From this superb equipment and from their years of experience in this theater the technical and artistic managers of the company have accumulated an impressive supply of lore, expertness, and even mystique regarding the performance of Shakespeare's plays in the Elizabethan mode.<sup>2</sup> In this article I propose to study the 1961 performance of *Hamlet* in order to try to determine what inferences we may draw concerning the performance of the play in the outdoor theaters of Shakespeare's time. After a brief preliminary analysis of the Ashland *Hamlet* and the Ashland playhouse, I shall discuss the cutting of the play for performance and the staging of the various scenes of *Hamlet* in the Ashland Festival theater.

## I. The Ashland Production of *Hamlet*

Many playgoers agree that the season of 1961 was one of the greatest in the history of the Oregon Festival and that the production of *Hamlet* was unusually successful. Apparently a minority objected to the concept of *Hamlet*

<sup>1</sup> See illustration in *SQ*, X, after p. 556.

<sup>2</sup> For "Elizabethan" in this paper read "Elizabethan-Jacobean", meaning, roughly, the period from the building of the first Globe in 1599 to the cessation of performances in outdoor theaters.

formulated by the director, Dr. Robert B. Loper of Stanford University. He created a full, florid, baroque, rococo, noisy production, the direct opposite of the traditional truncated, quiet versions in which an intellectual or moody Prince is the center of the play. The Hamlet, Mr. Richard D. Risso, also of Stanford, demonstrated Hamlet's intellectuality, but he also dominated the play with a noisy, vigorous, exciting though subtle reading. Objections to both concept and execution are legitimate, but if box office returns have meaning, the performance was generally acceptable to its audiences.<sup>3</sup> It was privileged to be present at most of the rehearsals and three of the first performances of *Hamlet* as well as at many rehearsals and early performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *1 Henry IV*, plus various rehearsals of *The Alchemist*. I base this paper on these experiences.<sup>4</sup>

## II. The Theater

The Oregon Shakespearean Festival Theater (designer, Richard L. Hay of Stanford University) was based on the well known contract for the Fortune playhouse between Henslowe and Alleyn and Peter Street, 1599/1600.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore a representation of the conventional idea of an Elizabethan outdoor theater, complete with platform stage, doors right and left, inner stage (called "inner below" at Ashland), balcony (called "inner above" at Ashland), windows right and left above, musicians' gallery in the third story, canopy with Heaven supported by pillars on the outer stage, and Hell below with access by trapdoors. A two-foot tarras as described by Adams (pp. 241-256 and *passim*) projects from and extends the depth of the inner above. The exterior is finished in imitation half-timber. In all these respects the Ashland theater resembles the Globe as reconstructed by Irwin Smith.<sup>6</sup>

It is an outdoor summer playhouse. (The 1961 season ran from July 24 to September 3, performances beginning at 8:30 P.M.) The productions differ from those of the Elizabethan outdoor theater in that the company uses modern electric lighting and electronic sound effects. Of course all women's roles are played by actresses. None of these departures modifies the Elizabethan technique of staging, though all three greatly enhance its beauty. For the purposes of this study they may be ignored.

In certain structural details, however, the Ashland theater differs from what we believe we know of the Globe and its contemporary theaters. Since

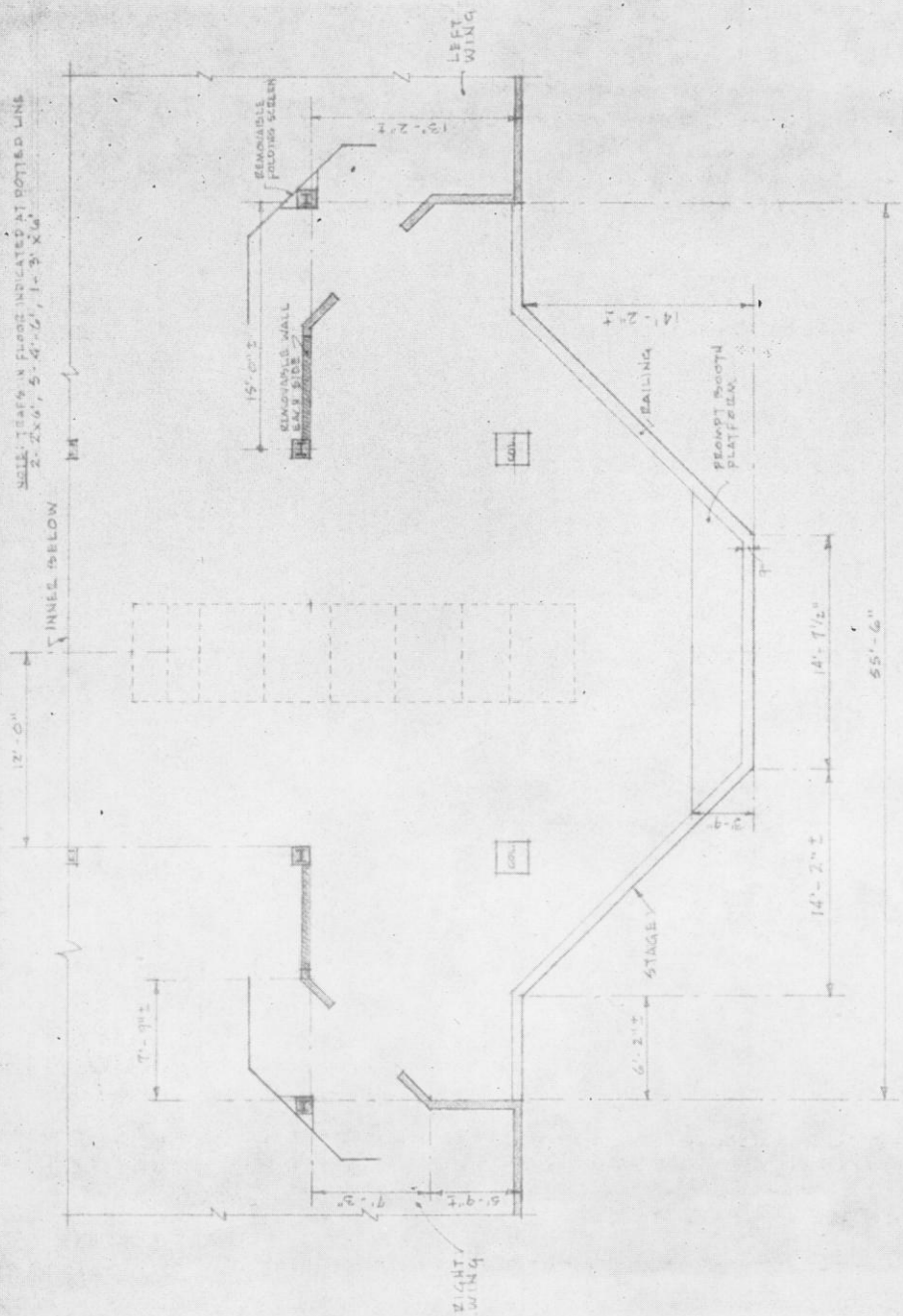
<sup>3</sup> In its ten evenings *Hamlet* played to 11,683 persons. It was surpassed only by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which, selling to standing-room at all performances, played to 12,406. Although this article is not the place for a review of the production, I mention the type of performance because it bears on my topic. If space permitted I would comment on many minor details and list and commend all of the cast. Watching this production from first rehearsal to opening night was the finest experience I have had in many years of playgoing.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Professor Angus L. Bowmer of Southern Oregon College, the Founder and Producing Director of the Oregon Shakespearean Festival, as well as to Dr. Loper for assisting me in my study, both of the Festival playhouse and of the production of *Hamlet*. It is also a pleasure to record the inspiration derived from Mr. Risso's memorable and striking performance as Hamlet. None of these three would necessarily agree with my conclusions, for which I alone am responsible.

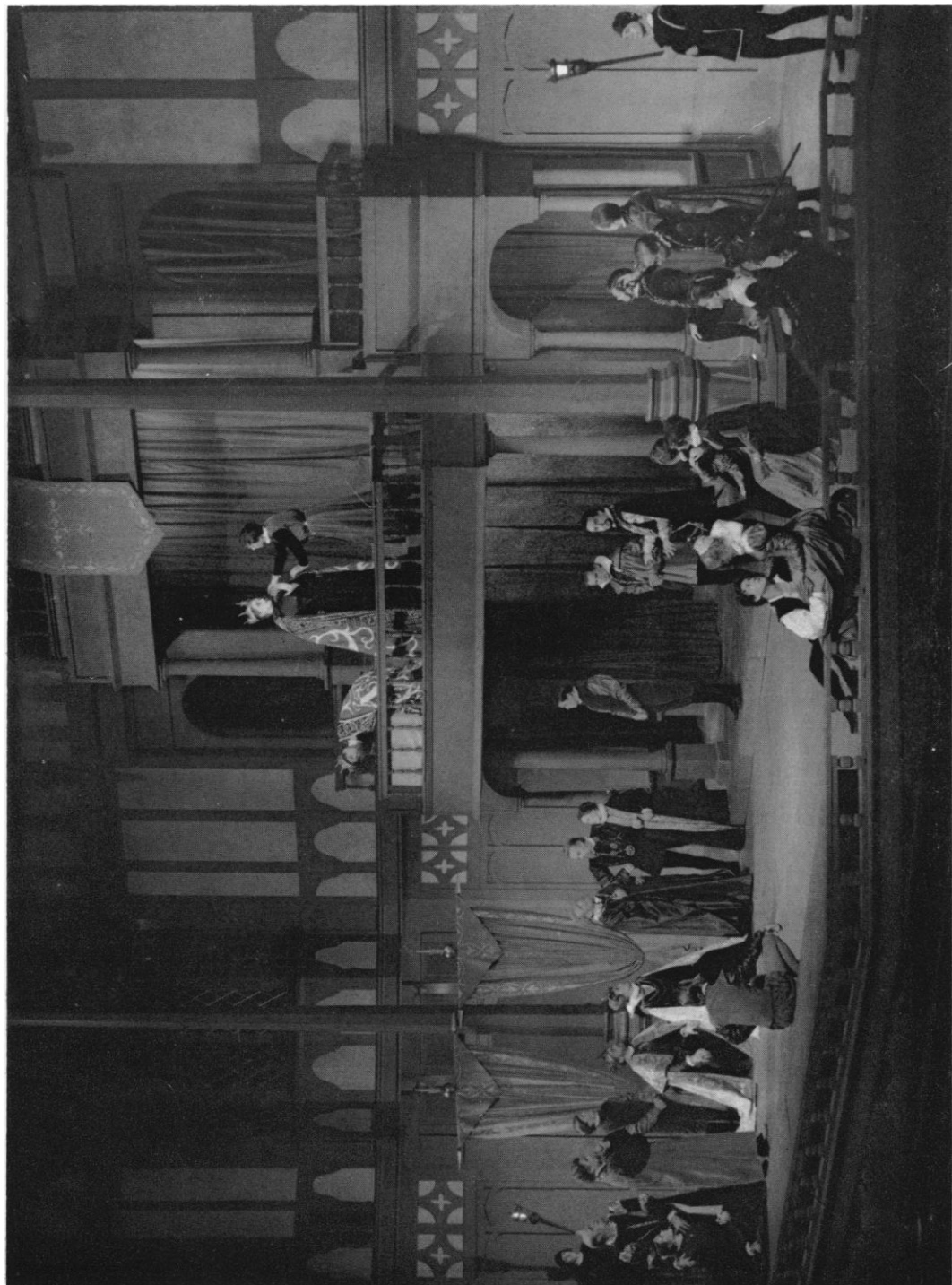
<sup>5</sup> Reprinted in John Cranford Adams, *The Globe Playhouse* (Cambridge, Harvard Un. Press, 1942), 390-393.

<sup>6</sup> *Shakespeare's Globe Playhouse* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956). I am familiar with and exclude by hypothesis the analysis of the form of Elizabethan playhouses advanced by Leslie Hotson in *Shakespeare's Wooden O* (New York, Macmillan, 1960).

NOTE: TRAFFIC FLOOR INDICATED AT DOTTED LINE  
2'-2x6", 5'-4'-6", 1'-3" X 6"



STAGE OF SHAKESPEAREAN FESTIVAL THEATER - ASHLAND OREGON  
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"



*Hamlet* III. ii as presented at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 1961. Photo by Dwaine Smith.

these modifications have a bearing on the director's decisions as he prepares a play for production, they may tend to weaken any conclusions to be drawn from the annual Ashland cycle. They therefore require a brief description.

#### a. Sight Lines and Voice Projection

The audience sits in a sloping horseshoe area containing 1165 seats. All seats command a view of the whole stage, though those persons seated at extreme right and left cannot see all the action in the right or left doorways or windows above the doorways. This is a minor disadvantage. More important is the extreme distance of the last row of seats. The Festival directors stage no scenes in the inner below, bringing the action out onto the platform stage so that it will seem closer to the spectators.

Probably even more important is the problem of projection. The Globe was an enclosed space (though open to the sky) with rear walls to reflect the voices from the stage; the Ashland theater requires the actors to speak to all outdoors. There is no sense of intimacy between actors and audience.

#### b. Size of the Stage

The fact that the audience at Ashland contributes little to the play is also a result of the stage's great size. According to the Henslowe contract, the Fortune stage was to be 43 feet in width and in depth to extend to the center of the theater. Though the depth, 27 feet (I give all dimensions in whole numbers) is less than the conjectured depth of the Globe, 29 feet, the width of the Ashland stage at its widest is 55 feet, tapering to 15 feet. Adams believes that, assuming a tapering stage, the Globe platform had an area of 1004 square feet. The Ashland stage has an area of approximately 1163 square feet.<sup>7</sup> Both the actual size and the impression of spaciousness at Ashland come from the fact that the conjectural areas to left and right of the platform in the imagined Globe, where, it is believed, spectators might stand, are at Ashland part of the platform. The taper lines of the stage extend to a point on each side that is six feet from the tiring house wall.

Thus, though the actors in the Festival theater are not surrounded on three sides, as supposedly at the Globe, the Ashland performers have enough space to manage their spectacles well—an advantage in the various court scenes in *Hamlet*.

#### c. The Pavilion

One of the most controversial parts of the imagined Globe is the inner stage: whether there was one, and, if there was, how it was used. At Ashland there is an "inner below" 24 feet wide and 15 feet deep, but, as previously stated, it is not used because of its remoteness from the audience. The designer solved the problem by adopting and adapting the suggestion of C. Walter Hodges that there must have been a "pavilion" in front of the inner below.<sup>8</sup> The pavilion at Ashland is a removable square enclosure approximately 12 by

<sup>7</sup> Adams, pp. 95, 98; Smith, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> *The Globe Restored* (New York: Coward McCann, 1954), 56-61, with sketches on pp. 59, 170, 177. Note especially the sketch on p. 173. See also A. M. Nagler, *Shakespeare's Stage* (New Haven: Yale Un. Press, 1958), pp. 26-32.

12 feet in area located at the center of upstage with its back to the inner below. It consists of a flat roof (surrounded by a railing) approximately two feet lower than the inner above and supported upstage on the tiring-house wall, downstage by two posts right and left. Two steps down provide access from the inner above to the pavilion roof; the floor below is raised six inches above the platform level when the pavilion is in use. Curtains drawn invisibly by ropes and pulleys enclose the pavilion at platform level on all four sides and are used *ad lib*. Performers may enter or emerge from the pavilion at any point.

The pavilion performs two functions. First, at the platform level it provides the enclosed space needed in some part of nearly every Elizabethan play. Second, the use of its roof as a floor brings the action down toward the audience from the inner above; it is an extension of the inner above. The Ashland performers use the pavilion so extensively and successfully and it is structurally so well integrated with the rest of the stage, both above and below, that the observer is forced to agree with Hodges' guess. Shakespeare's company should have had a pavilion if it did not.<sup>9</sup>

#### d. The Pillar-benches

As in the various conjectured Globes and the so-called De Witt sketch of the Swan, Heaven in the Ashland theater is supported by two great pillars left and right. The Ashland theater differs in that each pillar is surrounded (except upstage) by a fixed but removable pillar-bench. I have seen no mention of such benches in Elizabethan drama or in the scholarly reconstructions of the Globe and other theaters, but like the pavilion, they appear to be a useful and even necessary addition to the stage, being employed constantly for both standing and sitting.<sup>10</sup>

#### e. The Prompt-booth Platform

This, a platform raised nine inches above the stage level, occupies the apex of the narrowed stage to a depth of three feet nine inches and, at its widest, a width of 20 feet. The upstage face is open; here the prompter, sitting in Hell, observes the performance. The actors walk, sit, and stand on the platform above the prompter's head. They also sit *ad lib*. on the low railing that extends around the front of the stage.

In order to help visualize the performance of *Hamlet* as I describe it, the reader should look at the sketch by Hodges on p. 173 of *The Globe Restored*, already cited, adding to it in his mind's eye the pillar-benches and the low

<sup>9</sup> During the season of 1961 the director of *All's Well That Ends Well*, Mr. Charles G. Taylor, produced the play without using the pavilion. He did not employ the inner below at all. For "discovering" the court scenes he used enormous drapes (drawn by pages) extending between the two stage pillars (see below) and from platform level to Heaven. For the scenes in the widow's house (III. v and vii) he used the inner above. Visibility and acoustics in these two scenes were adequate, though the actors seemed to be rather far removed from the audience. In the ring-scene between Bertram and Diana (IV. ii), Diana appeared in the window above the stage door right and Bertram spoke to her from the platform, then ascended a trellis (supplied for this play) to give her the ring. The production without the pavilion, though successful, was an unusual feat for the Ashland playhouse.

<sup>10</sup> During 1961 the only exception was 1 *Henry IV*. Probably the benches would have obstructed the fighting at Shrewsbury (V. iii and iv). Mr. Risso directed this play.

prompt-booth platform. He will not see the spaciousness of the Ashland stage, but he will understand its variations from the normal concept of an Elizabethan platform stage.

### III. Cuts

As is well known, *Hamlet* is the longest play in the canon, containing more than 3900 lines in the Globe text. One concern of modern scholarship has been the problem of cutting: how did Shakespeare's company bring the play to manageable performance time? What indeed was maximum performance time in the Globe? I can offer no answer to these questions except to report and comment on the Ashland director's technique of cutting.

Dr. Loper cut 633 lines, leaving 3300 to be spoken. (All my figures are approximate. What constitutes a line when half a line is cut?) With two exceptions he caused the play to proceed at a rapid pace. The court scenes—that is, scene ii of Acts I, II, III, and V—were all introduced by means of an elaborate entrance assembly with banners and trumpets. The Festival company is especially proficient in this technique, taking full advantage of the size of the stage. Nevertheless there is an actual though not an apparent slowing of pace, no lines being spoken during these assemblies. Second, the director caused *Hamlet* to retard his delivery in a few places, notably at “we defy augury,” V. ii. 230.

The Ashland company performs all plays without act or scene divisions and with no intermissions, actors for a new scene entering as the last lines of a preceding scene are spoken. Most lines receive normal but rapid delivery. These techniques that make for rapidity added greatly to the excitement of this performance of *Hamlet*, as did, for example, the almost instantaneous emptying of the stage at the end of the play within the play, III. ii.

In spite of the swift action and delivery, the average playing time of the play as cut was three hours and five minutes, longer than most performance times in this theater. The 633 omitted lines, delivered at the same pace, would have required another 40 minutes. Thus the Ashland performance obviously confirmed one conclusion made by scholars previously: more of *Hamlet* can be performed in the Elizabethan manner than in any other way.

We may demonstrate this conclusion by another approach—by asking what was left of the play after so many lines were cut. The answer is, nearly everything. The director cut speeches and portions of speeches rather than whole scenes. In general, he made four sorts of cuts. First, he cut all the passage about the war of the theaters, II. ii. 340-385. Second, he reduced the number of lines devoted to the plotting of Claudius and Laertes, IV. vii, but omitted nothing essential. Third, he cut nearly all those speeches and parts of speeches that consist of homiletic generalizations or discussions of a philosophic idea, though not, of course, Polonius' advice to Laertes. One example is the speech of Rosencrantz, III. iii. 11-23, “The single and peculiar life is bound . . .”. Fourth, he omitted the Lord who follows Osric to remind *Hamlet* of the duel, V. ii. 203-218; and he cut the Ambassador from England, V. ii. 378-387, otherwise retaining all the characters of the play.

The Ashland performance therefore contained all the parts of the play that are often omitted under the star system: all of *Hamlet*'s soliloquies, including

"How all occasions do inform against me", IV. iv. 32-66; a complete reading of all three of the letters from Hamlet—to Ophelia, II. ii. 110-123, to Horatio, IV. vi, to Claudius, IV. vii. 43-49; all the lines of the Ghost and of Ophelia; all of the Player's speech about Pyrrhus, Priam, and Hecuba, II. ii. 472-541; the dumb show as well as most of the Mousetrap (ten lines cut from the Player Queen, 22 from the Player King). One surprise that emerged from the performance was the restoration of Horatio to importance as a fully developed character.

If an observer were to object to any part of the cutting, he would regret the omission of perhaps three passages: the sponge, IV. ii. 9-24; drink up eisel, V. i. 97-107; and Hamlet's regret "That to Laertes I forgot myself", V. i. 74-79—all these to demonstrate and project the character of Hamlet.

Nevertheless we may conclude that the play *Hamlet* may be adequately and perhaps most successfully cut without damage if it is cut for performance in the Elizabethan manner on a fully equipped Elizabethan stage. It may be that Burbage and company trimmed the play in much the same way as did Dr. Loper and the Festival company.

#### IV. The Court Scenes

I shall devote most of the remainder of this paper to a discussion of the court, closet, upper, and ghost scenes and to one hoary tradition.

The Ashland company customarily uses the playing areas above the platform both as separate areas and as adjuncts to the platform stage. These areas are the inner above and pavilion roof, the window areas right and left above, and the musicians' gallery far above. In the four court scenes of *Hamlet*, the inner above plus pavilion roof and the musicians' gallery became adjuncts to the main performance on the platform.

##### a. I. ii.

Trumpets play. Enter two trumpeters in the musicians' gallery; banner carriers with large banners enter left and right below and cross, taking positions right and left. Enter the "state", *i.e.*, two gold cloths affixed to poles. The carriers set the poles in sockets back of the left pillar-bench in such a way that the state is behind the King and Queen after they have entered and sat on the left pillar-bench, facing half downstage and half right. Enter two lords from the inner above onto the pavilion roof. Enter right and left Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia, Cornelius, Voltimand, Osric (a kind of major-domo here and in II. ii), lords, priests, secretary bearing box of commissions, scepter-bearer. The action then takes place center downstage, the King beginning at his seat on the left pillar-bench and rising to cross right. The lords on the pavilion roof participate in the scene by their actions and by their attention.

This and each of the later assemblies took less than 15 seconds of playing time, dispersal in I. ii and III. ii even less.

##### b. II. ii.

The assembly for this scene was simpler, involving fewer characters, and the state was placed back of the right pillar-bench, which formed the center of the King's operations. Voltimand and Cornelius return to the flourish of trumpets.

There is no general dispersal. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go off with attendant lords on their cue, Voltimand and Cornelius at theirs. Polonius waves the state off just before the entrance of Hamlet at line 170.

c. III. ii. 97, the play scene.

This was the most crowded scene of all. Musicians are discovered in the musicians' gallery, where an attendant hangs a banner over the railing. Torch-bearers with lighted torches cross each other and take positions left and right. The state is placed behind the right pillar-bench, and this is the station from which King and Queen watch the play. Lords and ladies stand back of them, and others cluster on, around, and back of the left pillar-bench. Horatio, with his back to the right pavilion post, stands watching the King. Ophelia sits on the railing down left just beyond the prompt-booth platform. Here Hamlet joins her and from this post observes and comments.

What of the pavilion roof and the inner above? This area is reserved for the dumb show, and all eyes below watch as it is acted out in its entirety to the rhythmic beat of music from the gallery. The semblance of the poisoning and the wooing occurs as far down as possible on the pavilion roof. The Prologue then introduces the play, lines 159-161, from the pavilion roof.

The Mousetrap is enacted downstage below, Player King, Player Queen, and Player Lucianus emerging from the inner below and across the open pavilion. Player King lies down on the prompt-booth platform. I have already mentioned the extremely rapid dispersal of this scene on the King's exclamation, line 281.

d. V. ii. 235 to end, the finale.

Here for the first time in the play thrones are discovered facing downstage just inside the front pavilion curtain. Simultaneously trumpeters appear in the musicians' gallery, trumpets are sounded, banners are carried to left and right on the pavilion roof and to left and right below. Two lords, the judges of the bout, stand downstage on the pavilion roof. King and Queen occupy their thrones; Osric and other lords and ladies sit and stand on or near the pillar-benches left and right. Two attendants with the foils and the table and goblets stand within the pavilion to left and right of King and Queen.

The fencing-match (with rapiers and daggers) and the deaths of Hamlet and Laertes thus take place in the open space in front of the pavilion and between the two great pillars. The Queen is poisoned and the King stabbed and poisoned in this space, both falling on their thrones to die, for they are thus placed inside the pavilion curtain. Fortinbras and party enter at the great door right. Trumpets and cannon sound at the King's drinking to Hamlet, line 294; and the play concludes with a dead march of trumpets and repeated boom of cannon as soldiers bear off the bodies of Hamlet and Laertes. All have thus dispersed, and the curtains are drawn in front of the two attendants and the bodies of King and Queen. The stage is empty.

We may ask how these court scenes fit in with current ideas as to how the scenes were managed on Shakespeare's stage. One of the most searching discussions of the Elizabethan staging of *Hamlet* is the short article by George F. Reynolds called "*Hamlet* at the Globe".<sup>11</sup> He assumed the presence of a cur-

<sup>11</sup> *Shakespeare Survey*, 9 (Cambridge Un. Press, 1956), pp. 49-53.

tained space throughout the play (of this, more later); and he believed that thrones placed right or left remained there throughout, to be used in the court scenes but ignored in other scenes. After study of the Ashland performance I believe Reynolds is right in his assumptions but perhaps wrong in details. As to the court scenes, Reynolds ignored the possibility of action above the main stage. Assuming that there was an inner above in the Globe and even a pavilion roof (as in Hodges; see above), why would Shakespeare's company not use them, as well as the windows and the musicians' gallery, as adjuncts to the main action below? The Ashland company so uses these areas in scene after scene of play after play, and with great success. The upper areas add many square feet to the space available for playing a crowded scene. Of course the most striking adjunct use of inner above and pavilion roof in *Hamlet* was the performance of the dumb show there in III. ii.

Second, we need not assume the presence of fixed thrones throughout the play, though some such appurtenance of majesty is necessary. For three of the court scenes Dr. Loper ingeniously devised the state as a more portable appurtenance and utilized the fixed pillar-benches as throne seats. If there were no pillar-benches in the Globe, could not attendants bring in and remove thrones at need? The Ashland use of thrones in the final scene was probably to provide a convenient and decorous repository for the bodies of the King and Queen, one that could be finally closed off by the pavilion curtains.

#### V. Closet Scenes

There are customarily supposed to be three closet scenes in *Hamlet*: the part of III. ii that contains the play within the play; III. iii, the "prayer" scene; and III. iv, the bedroom scene. Note that though these appear to follow hard upon each other, there is no difficulty in using the same curtained space (or pavilion) for all three. Since several lines intervene after the play within the play and after the prayer scene, there is an interval for resetting the enclosed space if any clearing away or bringing in of properties is needed. Indeed, we may assign this as the reason why Shakespeare wrote the intervening lines.

In the Ashland performance the director used the pavilion for one of these scenes only, the bedroom scene, III. iv, and for only a part of that scene. The Queen and Polonius enter the pavilion with the curtains enclosing the sides but not drawn across the front. Polonius hides behind an arras (hung for this scene only) halfway upstage in the pavilion, and is there stabbed, his body falling through the arras and remaining throughout the scene downstage of the arras. The remainder of the scene, played on the platform, centers on the left pillar-bench, where Hamlet upbraids the Queen and forces her to compare the two pictures.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the scene Hamlet drags Polonius off by the legs into the curtained inner below—that is, upstage left.

For the play within the play the director placed the dumb show above, as already mentioned, and the spoken lines below on the platform just upstage from and on the prompt-booth platform. Why? Because of sight lines. If King,

<sup>12</sup> Miniatures hung around his neck and hers, incidentally, thus confirming this stage tradition. It is difficult to conceive of painted portraits hung within the curtained space; if they were large enough for the audience to discern the features they would be obtrusive. Besides, Hamlet and Gertrude are not in the curtained space.

Queen, and courtiers sit right and left, they prevent many spectators from seeing the curtained space, even in the sumptuous Ashland theater, where sight lines are unusually good. Visibility would be at least as bad from the ground or from the lowest tier of gallery seats in any of the conjectural theaters of the Globe, Fortune, or Swan type. Thus Reynolds is probably wrong when he assumes a bank of flowers within the curtained space as the location of the murder of Gonzago.

Dr. Loper's handling of the so-called prayer scene, III. iii, is less easy to defend. He had the King emerge from his study (the pavilion), drawing the curtain across the front as he began speaking, say his lines downstage, then kneel at the left of the prompt-booth platform. Hamlet enters through the pavilion curtains, his drawn sword appearing first, then the actor, who threatens the kneeling King from behind and slightly to the right. At "Up, sword", however, he does not sheathe his weapon but exit right, blade in hand.

Again, the probable reason for bringing the action out is to improve sight lines and audibility. But the scene gave no illusion that this was a closet or private chapel; the spectator could not help wondering why the King was attempting to pray in the open lobby. The King might have said his lines at the front of the pavilion and then knelt within, Hamlet coming to him from one of the doors left or right.

What the Ashland performance confirms about these three closet scenes is Reynolds' twin assumptions (pp. 49-50) that an inner below would be too far away from the audience and that even a projecting curtained space must have been used sparingly with at least part of the action brought forward to the open stage.

## VI. Inner Above and Pavilion Roof Scenes

No scenes in *Hamlet* require the use of any upper-level area in the sense that the three scenes just described ordinarily require a curtained space. Nevertheless it is the custom in the Ashland theater to perform some scenes above, either wholly or as adjunct to main-level scenes.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the four court scenes, the director used the upper levels as adjuncts to the platform in I. ii and I. iv, the two early ghost scenes (to be discussed separately), and in IV. ii, IV. iii, and IV. iv.

Hamlet spoke the line "Safely stowed" (IV. ii. 1) at the window above right, opening the window to say the line and closing it immediately afterward.<sup>14</sup> For the next few lines he appeared on the pavilion roof watching the lords search below, spoke "Who calls on Hamlet", backed up to the inner above (lines 9 through 25 were cut), parleyed with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, shouted "Hide, fox, and all after", and ran off left of the inner above.

In the next scene, IV. iii, Rosencrantz spoke to the King, below, and to Guildenstern, off left below, from the pavilion roof.

In IV. iv Fortinbras and soldiers marched across the inner above, right to left, pausing briefly to descend to the pavilion roof. Hamlet and the Captain

<sup>13</sup> In 1961 the only exception was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, whose director, Mr. B. Iden Payne, chose to perform all scenes below.

<sup>14</sup> This was not a successful device. Probably most of the audience could not hear or could not understand the line and merely wondered fleetingly why Hamlet suddenly appeared at a window.

carried on their colloquy below, and Hamlet uttered his soliloquy, "How all occasions do inform against me" (lines 32-66) below.

Only one scene, IV. vi (Horatio, the sailors, Hamlet's letter), was performed wholly above, Horatio speaking down left on the pavilion roof.

Since our information as to the Elizabethan use of upper areas is uncertain, we can draw no safe inferences from the Ashland use of the inner above and pavilion roof. These areas are so convenient, however, and so useful for providing variety that we may suppose the Elizabethans used them whenever the theater was so equipped and spectators were not seated above. I cannot believe that Reynolds' analysis is complete, since he makes no mention of upper levels.

## VII. Ghost Scenes

One detail that shows the versatility of the Ashland stage is the arrangement provided for trapdoors. Traps may be used at any point in a 6 x 27-foot oblong space extending from a point ten feet from the apex of the platform to a point eleven feet within the inner below. The upstage traps are seldom used. For *Hamlet* the company employed two trapdoors. Ophelia's body was lowered into the space farthest downstage. In the preceding lines it had rested on the floor downstage of the trap, and before that the Gravediggers had played their scene standing in the trap. At "Hold off the earth awhile" (V. i. 271), Laertes jumped into the grave upstage from Ophelia's body, and Hamlet leaped in after him.<sup>15</sup>

This brings us to the ghost scenes and the second trapdoor. Some commentators appear to believe that the Ghost must make frequent use of the trap.<sup>16</sup> Here is a good example of how experience in an Elizabethan theater will modify our ideas. There are at least three reasons why the Ghost must use the trap sparingly. First, too frequent use will move the audience to ridicule. See Sprague. Second, the Ghost, "clad in complete steel", as he was at Ashland, simply cannot make a quick exit through the trap, which has to be worked from below the stage with care and deliberation. The Ashland company tried it in rehearsal at I. i. 140 ("Shall I strike at it with my partisan?") and failed. Third, in one place, III. iv. 136 ("Look, where he goes, even now, out at the portal!"), the lines call for the Ghost to make a walking exit.

J. Dover Wilson believed that the first ghost scene must have been performed on "the upper-stage". Harley Granville-Barker disagreed and nominated the lower stage.<sup>17</sup> Again, practical experience in an Elizabethan theater may solve the problem. I would guess that the Globe company used both stages, as did the Ashland company. This is another example of employing the upper areas as convenient adjuncts to the platform stage.

I. i. The play opens with the conventional fanfare. A bell strikes twelve; at the twelfth stroke Francisco appears below. At line 40 the Ghost appears at the inner above, left, crosses and disappears right, while Horatio speaks to it from below. At line 126 the Ghost reappears, this time at the door below, right, stalks

<sup>15</sup> This action probably demonstrates that it has never been necessary for any Laertes or Hamlet, from Burbage to the present, to leap upon or near Ophelia's bier.

<sup>16</sup> Reynolds, 52. For an account of the stage traditions on this point see Arthur C. Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors* (Cambridge, Harvard Un. Press, 1944), 137-46; 162-6; see also J. G. McManaway, "The Two Earliest Prompt Books of *Hamlet*," *PBSA*, XLIII, 2-34, especially 28-33.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson's New Shakespeare ed. of *Hamlet* (Cambridge Un. Press, 1934), p. 143, n. Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (Princeton Un. Press, 1946), I, 57, n. 14.

to the center, and then (as a cock crows offstage and during the business with the partisans) quickly disappears upstage through the pavilion. Throughout this and the subsequent appearances of the Ghost a musician beats a muted cymbal in the musicians' gallery.

The only factor that might vitiate this as well as the other ghost scenes as an authentic Elizabethan management of the Ghost is the modern lighting, the Ashland theater using all possible lighting devices. But I do not think so. The Elizabethans probably accepted their own stage conventions regarding light and darkness just as we accept ours.

I. iv. In this scene Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus appear at the inner above, left, and descend to the pavilion roof. After the Ghost appears again at inner above left and crosses right, Hamlet addresses him and follows him up and out right. At this point we probably have an example of Shakespeare's unobtrusive writing for his own Globe playhouse. The five lines of Horatio and Marcellus, 86-91, if they are spoken slowly (because of the great size of the Ashland theater), are just enough to give the Ghost and Hamlet time to reappear below for the next scene.

I. v. The Ghost reappears through the pavilion center and delivers his speeches on the floor, the roof of the trap, just downstage from the pavilion and upstage from the forward trap that will later be Ophelia's grave. Hamlet appears through the door right and listens to most of the Ghost's lines from the right pillar-bench. At "Adieu, adieu, remember me" (line 91), the Ghost disappears below to the accompaniment of smoke from Hell (which is for the moment Purgatory). Hamlet begins his wild and whirling words as he kneels on the pavilion floor upstage of the now closed trap, then for "my tables" (line 107) moves to the left pillar-bench. The Ghost calls "Swear!" from the prompt-booth opening, giving the effect of a "cellarage".

III. iv. 102. It is difficult to see how these scenes could be better arranged, particularly since the next appearance of the Ghost during the Queen's closet scene is up through this same trap. Hamlet and Gertrude are at the left pillar-bench; on Hamlet's speech (lines 134-135), "Why, look you there! look, how it steals away! / My father, in his habit, as he lived!" the Ghost crosses right, turns upstage and leaves by the "portal"—that is, the arch upstage just right of the pavilion.

### VIII. "Behind the arras."

Of the many other aspects of the Ashland Elizabethan staging of *Hamlet* I shall choose only one for comment. The director deliberately rejected the long stage tradition that in III. i Polonius (or the King, or both) appears through the arras or shakes the arras with the result that Hamlet realizes they are spying on him.<sup>18</sup> Dr. Loper believes that this is an unnecessary bit of action. I agree with this judgment, though I submit that if one adheres to Schücking's theories as to the obviousness of Shakespeare's stage devices and informative speeches, as I do,<sup>19</sup> he must believe that some such ploy was necessary so as to inform the naiver members of the audience about what was going on. The Ashland omission of this piece of business may thus be a modern modification of Elizabethan

<sup>18</sup> See Sprague, 152-154.

<sup>19</sup> Levin L. Schücking, *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Henry Holt, 1922).

technique. Similarly the director omitted the King's reminder line, V.ii.303, "It is the poison'd cup, it is too late", probably also because it is unnecessary and might seem silly to a modern audience.

Granville-Barker spoke of "the frictionless technique of the Elizabethan stage" (p. 96, n. 26). Any scholar who studies the performance of Shakespeare's plays at Ashland must agree with Granville-Barker's phrase. In this article I have discussed only the grosser aspects of a modern Elizabethan performance of *Hamlet*. As one observes these and a score of lesser details, one attains an inner conviction: "Yes, this is the way it must have been done." Yet he cannot prove it, for, as Reynolds pointed out, *Hamlet* does not absolutely require any Elizabethan stage device. It could be performed without undue distortion on any large open space.

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