ON HALLOWED GROUND: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION AND ARCHITECTURAL SPACE IN THE IDENTITIES OF THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY AND SHAKESPEARE’S GLOBE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the

Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By

Christina Ritter, M.A.

The Ohio State University
2007

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Thomas Postlewait, Advisor
Dr. Lesley Ferris
Dr. Richard Dutton

Approved by

Advisor
Theatre Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

The Shakespeare Memorial Festival, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and Shakespeare’s Globe all have shared the unique characteristic of being located in places of significance to the life of William Shakespeare. The Memorial Festival was established in 1879 at Shakespeare’s birthplace of Stratford-upon-Avon, and its successor, the RSC, founded in 1960, is likewise based in the town. The new Globe, an attempted replica of the 1599 Globe, opened officially in 1997 and is located in London Southwark, the neighborhood where the original Globe Theatre stood. Of the hundreds of theatre companies around the world dedicated to Shakespeare’s works, only these institutions derived their identities and missions partly from their connections to historically authentic locations.

The Memorial Festival prospered largely due to its tie to Stratford. The RSC and Shakespeare’s Globe have also benefited greatly from their connections to their locations. Nonetheless, they have faced artistic and cultural challenges as they have attempted to define their relationships to their significant sites.
Both locations, Stratford and Southwark, have been the objects of veneration for many theatre enthusiasts. Tourists—or pilgrims—have traveled long distances to experience Shakespeare’s birthplace and burial place (his tomb is also located in Stratford, in Holy Trinity Church), as well as his workplace on the south bank of the Thames in London. Despite this deep veneration, both locations have at various times in their histories been dismissed by critics as unsuitable places for performance. These widely varying attitudes forced the theatre companies to appropriate or reject the notions of authenticity and legitimacy that came with their sites. The companies separate choices on such issues have influenced and, in some cases, dictated, the designs of the theatre buildings in which they have performed.

This dissertation traces the histories of the relationships of the Shakespeare Memorial Festival, the RSC, and Shakespeare’s Globe to their respective locations and architectural spaces. In addition, I explore the current relationship between the RSC and the new Globe. Their separate reactions to their significant locations and spaces present competing methods and philosophies concerning theatrical production, and notions of authenticity and heritage.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor, Tom Postlewait, for his help and guidance throughout my graduate studies. I am especially grateful for the insights, patience, and emotional support he provided me during the dissertation-writing process.

I also wish to thank Lesley Ferris and Richard Dutton for their comments, time and effort as members of my dissertation committee.

I extend my gratitude to Tim Carroll, Andrew Gurr, Clive Mendus, Matt Wolf, and Sam West, who offered invaluable insights about the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare’s Globe.

Finally, I wish to thank Robert and Marcela Ritter, and Jack Schieffer for their support and encouragement.
VITA

1999……………………………………..B.A. History, Dartmouth College

2000……………………………………..Post-graduate Classic Acting Course
                                 London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art
                                       (LAMDA)

2004……………………………………..M.A. Theatre, The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Theatre
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapters:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Location, Space, and Authenticity</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Shakespeare Memorial Festival and Stratford-upon-Avon</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commemoration in Stratford: 1616-1879</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre: 1879-1932</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Modern Theatre: 1932-1959</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study: The Shakespeare Memorial Festival</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the Stuffed Stag</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Royal Shakespeare Company: Stratford and London</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Hall: 1959-1968</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor Nunn: 1968-1986</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Hands: 1986-1991</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Boyd: 2003-2007</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study: The Wars of the Roses</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Shakespeare’s Globe and Southwark ........................................... 148
   The 1599 Globe ................................................................. 151
   The New Globe .............................................................. 163
   Case Study: Measure for Measure ....................................... 188

   Conclusion ............................................................................. 197

Works Cited ............................................................................. 205
INTRODUCTION

The Royal Shakespeare Company, in Stratford-upon-Avon, and Shakespeare’s Globe, in the borough of Southwark in London, are arguably the two most famous Shakespearean performance companies in the world. Theatre enthusiasts on almost every continent recognize their names, and the press, performing arts professionals, and scholars regularly assess their work. Every year huge numbers of spectators purchase tickets to see their productions, and tours of England often include requisite stops at the RSC’s Stratford theatres or at the south bank site of the new Globe. Of course, dozens of other celebrated Shakespeare companies exist, including the Stratford Festival in Ontario, Canada, and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in the United States. In fact, successful companies that regularly perform the Bard’s work can be found throughout North America and in numerous countries, including Germany, Italy, France, and Japan.

Yet among the myriad Shakespeare companies, the RSC and the new Globe share a distinct characteristic that sets them apart from all of the others: they both are located in places tied to the private and public life of William Shakespeare. The RSC resides in Stratford, where he was born and buried, and the new Globe is situated in
the borough of Southwark, where his original theatre stood. ¹ These places—birthplace and workplace—possess historical, cultural, and even spiritual importance for many people interested in Shakespeare. Indeed, the global admiration for his work has transformed Stratford and Southwark into sacred locations that attract thousands of pilgrims each year. People come to see the sixteenth and seventeenth-century sites associated with the Bard’s life, as well as to experience the nineteenth and twentieth-century sites associated with the performance of his plays.

The architectural designs of these latter sites—the performances spaces—were influenced by the heritages of Stratford and Southwark, respectively. The new Globe theatre is the most obvious example; its structure and appearance was largely dictated by its location. Stratford’s theatrical spaces, occupied over the years by the Memorial Festival and the RSC, have also been heavily determined by their geography’s past as well as by people’s varying notions of authenticity.

As renowned Shakespeare companies in the early twenty-first century, the RSC and the new Globe clearly share fundamental similarities; but they also differ in many ways and to compare them as exact counterparts would be misleading. Their operational scales, administrative structures, sources of funding, and founding

¹ Shakespeare’s plays were performed in a number of theatres during his lifetime, not solely the Globe. Scholars debate whether the construction of the 1599 Globe was merely a compromise for the Chamberlain’s Men (and later the King’s Men) when they discovered they would not be allowed to occupy the Blackfriars theatre in the late sixteenth century, or whether it was indeed their chosen home.
missions are all distinct. In addition, their histories vary greatly; the RSC and its predecessor, the Shakespeare Memorial Festival, predate the new Globe by more than a century.

The RSC was founded in 1960, but its broader history traces back to 1879, when the Shakespeare Memorial Festival was established in Stratford. For nearly eighties years, this regional festival prospered as a popular annual event attracting locals and tourists alike. The Festival grew steadily over the course of its history, but it never received the critical acclaim that its successor, the RSC, would attain. The Memorial Festival’s location in the small, rural town dedicated to the worship of Shakespeare, led many critics to simply dismiss the artistic endeavors attempted there. Based merely on geography, which was often the case, the bias was unfounded.

Lauded actors and directors such as Frank Benson, Laurence Olivier, Peggy Ashcroft, and Theodore Komisarjevsky, to name but a few, worked at the Festival and received praise for their work there. Yet, frequently, critics did have good reason to discount productions; conservative approaches to staging often ruled in Stratford, resulting in predictable and stale performances. More often than not, the tradition of performance established during the Memorial Festival years was considered one of polite, safe productions.

The current RSC was established by Sir Peter Hall. He sought to reassess, and actively change, the status quo of the Memorial Festival as well as the widely-held attitudes about Stratford as unsuitable place for performance. Hall’s aim was to form
an ensemble of actors who would work together for an extended period of time—

hence the word “company” in the institution’s name. Although this goal has not

always translated into a fully realized repertory company, over the past four and a half
decades the RSC has developed into one of the world’s largest and most successful
theatrical organizations. Today, the RSC employs over 700 people in artistic and
administrative functions; the company performs in a variety of geographic locations
and theatrical spaces; and it regularly attracts well over half a million patrons
annually. The RSC’s primary theatres are in Stratford, though for years the company
also occupied the Aldwych and, later, the Barbican Centre, both in London. In 2002,
the RSC left its permanent home in the capital, though the company continues to
perform plays in various London venues, as well as in Newcastle, and on tour. Due to
its impressive size and endurance, as well as its strong tradition of politically and
socially relevant stagings of the Bard’s plays, the RSC is considered by many people
to be the “brand-name” in Shakespeare performance.

Shakespeare’s Globe, the name chosen to distinguish the new theatre from its
Elizabethan inspiration, is a more recent venture that opened officially in 1997. It
rapidly has built its reputation as a standard in Shakespeare performance. Unlike the
RSC, which is largely defined by its original mission of being an acting ensemble, the
Globe was conceived by Sam Wanamaker, its founder, first and foremost as a
theatrical space. Wanamaker originally did intended for there to be a resident acting
company at the theatre that would operate in a similar way to the Elizabethan and
Jacobean companies of Shakespeare day, but his first concern was the construction of the theatre building. According to the organization’s marketing information, Shakespeare’s Globe is a “facility . . . that consists of three enterprises”: Globe Education, the Globe Exhibition, and the Globe Company. I am concerned primarily with the last of these, and in discussing Shakespeare’s Globe I will be referring both to the theatre building and to the company within it.

The distinction between facility and company is important when comparing Shakespeare’s Globe to the RSC. The Globe Company—its name even—is bound to the building that houses it in a way that has no parallel within the RSC. The implication, in fact, is that any resident acting company in the new Globe is defined solely by the theatre building. In essence, it is; the company seeks to explore Elizabethan and Jacobean approaches to Shakespeare and these explorations are, for the most part, discerned from the experience of playing within the lime plaster walls of the new Globe on the thrust stage, with spectators on three sides. Yet beyond the theatre building, the company members attempt to transplant what they have learned from working inside the replicated space to different kinds of venues and stage spaces. Shakespeare’s Globe Company also has performed in places such a Middle Temple Hall and Hampton Court, again with the intention of exploring historical spaces for better understanding of Shakespeare’s plays in performance. The company tours occasionally, testing, in a sense, what it has learned. In 2005-06, for example, the

---

2 The practical application of a permanent company has been difficult to realize; instead the new Globe, like the RSC, employs actors for various contractual lengths.
Globe traveled to several cities in the United States with a production of Measure for Measure. These instances have proven that the company possesses an identity separate from its home theatre, though ultimately tied to it.

By 2006, not quite a decade after its opening, the new Globe was attracting roughly three quarters of a million visitors per year. Many people come simply to see the theatre or tour the exhibition; a much smaller number actually attended performances. This statistic highlights additional differences between the Globe and the RSC. While both companies maintain public images as institutions of artistic and historical value, the Globe is perceived by tourists and locals more as of a symbol of heritage than the RSC, which is regarded predominantly as an artistic organization. Some people view the embrace of heritage as a positive force, while others deride it as part of a larger heritage industry tied to tourism, which has grown in Britain throughout the twentieth century. The Globe, the critics claim, is a prime example of false heritage, propagated by tourism. They see the new Globe as a replica that whitewashes the past, popularizes, and dumbs-down Shakespeare. Supporters of the theatre counter that the Globe is an impressive act of historical reclamation, based upon scholarship and the applied practices of performances in the reconstructed space. They argue that years of meticulous research went into its reconstruction, deepening the academic community’s understanding of Elizabethan playhouses. Supporters also contend that the popular appeal of the new theatre returns Shakespeare’s plays to their original purpose and audience: accessible entertainment for all. Fears that the Globe,
as Robert Butler summarizes, “finds its place on the tourist map somewhere between Madame Tussaud’s, the London Dungeon and the Hard Rock Café” are countered by the belief that the new theatre is a piece of “rarified scholarship,” wonderfully successful in its artistic, historical, and popular appeal.3

The notion of heritage as it relates to the RSC is also complex. The company prospers largely on people’s continued interest in the heritage of Britain—in the nation’s most famous poet and his historical sites. Without the large numbers of visitors who descend from tour buses each day in Stratford to see the sites and enjoy a play, the RSC’s audience would be significantly smaller. Nevertheless, the RSC has fought against being cast as pillar of tradition and heritage. Part of the company’s original mission was to break from accustomed methods of playing Shakespeare and to instead approach the plays as though they were contemporary works addressing the modern world.

Funding for both companies derives in part from their different relationships to heritage, though, for various reasons, the allocation of funds for the Globe has not always aligned with public perception of the company. Though seen by many as both a heritage and an arts institution, the new Globe nonetheless was rejected by the Heritage Lottery Fund in their request for construction money because, as a replica, the theatre was not, according to the Fund, a historical project. In fact, much of the initial construction cost for the theatre was covered, not by heritage or arts grants, but

---

by donations from individual contributions, a third of which came from Americans.\(^4\)

For the first decade of its operation, the new Globe has been self-financed, relying heavily on private-sector donations and on National Lottery grants apportioned for arts organizations (distinct from heritage organizations). The Globe, in its first decade, has received no annual funding directly from the government. The RSC, by contrast, has from its inception under Hall drawn large amounts of subsidy from the British government.\(^5\) In recent years The RSC has acquired over £10 million annually in subsidies from the national government’s art funding body, the Arts Council of England. The RSC is one of five national performing arts organizations in Britain partially funded by the council—the others being the Royal National Theatre, the Royal Opera, the Royal Ballet, and the English National Opera. For additional funding, outside of ticket sales, the RSC relies on private-sector donations, including international contributors.

Sir Peter Hall purposely established the RSC as a national arts organization, even though he understood the challenges involved in such a scheme. In the early 1960s, he argued for government funding for the company and, in conjunction, for its official national status. At the time he petitioned for these changes, the National Theatre (NT) was also being established and critics and government funding bodies questioned the need for two national theatre organizations.\(^6\) The result from this early,

\(^4\) Bulter.
\(^5\) Gurr, Andrew. Interview. 21 August 2006.
\(^6\) The National Theatre became the Royal National Theatre in 1988. The Queen commemorated the institutions 25\(^{th}\) anniversary with the new title.
direct competition between the RSC and the NT was that while RSC would be permitted to operate at a “National Theatre level,” the treasury would not compensate the company to the same degree as the NT. As Colin Chambers describes, the RSC “would always be the poor relation” of the NT. Nonetheless, the RSC has maintained its status over the years, producing a comparable level of work—in terms of output, scale, and critical acclaim—to the NT. From the 1960s onward the two companies have generally been viewed by critics and theatre-goers as positive, necessary competitors, raising standards and pushing artistic boundaries.

The new Globe possesses no formal identity as a national institution, nor does it aspire to. Yet its attachment to Britain’s national poet and secular saint means inevitably that the company’s work represents key aspects of the country’s history and culture. Both the RSC and Shakespeare’s Globe also maintain international profiles, attracting tourists from around the world and occasionally touring outside of Britain. The new Globe, in addition, has a particular tie to the United States (beyond monetary donations): Sam Wanamaker, its founder, was from Chicago, and Mark Rylance, the company’s first artistic director, grew up in Milwaukee (though he was born in England). This American connection has not determined the national character and public identity of the company, but it has set the stage, so to speak, for the new Globe’s broad cultural reach—beyond the borders of England. Interestingly, the two leading scholarly advisors for the reconstruction of the theatre were also foreigners:

John Orrell came from Canada and Andrew Gurr from New Zealand. Shakespeare’s Globe claims on its website that the theatre seeks to “further the experience and international understanding of Shakespeare in performance,” all the while “uniquely . . . [celebrating] the fact that the greatest dramatic poet in the English language lived and worked in London and that the cradle of English theatre was on Bankside by the River Thames.”

For both companies, education plays a substantial part in their larger identities. The RSC and the new Globe cultivate outreach and education agendas dedicated to furthering the understanding of Shakespeare’s works, life, and world. Again, though, the specific missions of each company’s education initiatives vary. The RSC Learning department aims to “respond to Shakespeare’s plays through the work of contemporary actors, writers, and artists.” The company provides workshops, tours, teaching materials, and extensive online resources for students, teachers, families, and the general public. Their family productions, such as the widely successful 1998 stage adaptations of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, aim to increase the company’s appeal for younger audiences.

---

10 The Royal Shakespeare Company. 28 June 2007. <http://www.rsc.org.uk/content/2781.aspx>
Notably, though, the RSC education program does not focus especially on the town of Stratford. The many buildings within the town related to Shakespeare life and open to tourists are quite separate from the RSC’s outreach efforts. Shakespeare’s Trust, an organization independent from the RSC, manages the educational and historical material associated with Shakespeare life in Stratford.

While the RSC’s outreach and educational resources are considerable, the company was never intended, in the way that new Globe was, to be explicitly an “educational resource.”\textsuperscript{11} Globe Education, along with the Globe Exhibition, upholds one of the primary functions Sam Wanamaker intended for the new Globe: to learn more about every aspect of Elizabethan and Jacobean performance. Globe Education caters to more than 70,000 students and teachers annually.\textsuperscript{12} The department provides similar opportunities to those offered by the RSC—workshops, tours, online resources, etc—but the Globe focuses especially on the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre world and staging techniques whereas the RSC emphasizes Shakespeare’s place in the contemporary world. The Globe Exhibition, a year-round museum located in a modern structure adjacent to the new theatre, features permanent and temporary collections of Elizabethan and Jacobean costumes, musical instruments, documents and records, as well as information on the construction of the replicated theatre. Here the location of Southwark plays an important role. In fact, the educational aspects of the new Globe are inseparably linked to its location. Southwark provides a backdrop

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Carroll, Tim. Interview. 16 August 2006.
\item 1 July 2007. <http://www.shakespeares-globe.org/globeeducation/>  
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
for education and, specifically, for the exhibition. Some of the artifacts preserved in
the museum, for instance, come directly from the land surrounding the new Globe.

The very idea of the new Globe is tied to educational pretexts. From its
inception, the project of rebuilding Shakespeare’s theatre was largely about discovery
and reclamation of the past. Although, over the course of the theatre’s short history,
various people have challenged the validity and consequences of these ideals,
educational motives have nonetheless remained an important part of the new Globe’s
mission.

The academic community has influenced both companies as well, yet as with
its ties to education, the Globe’s association with the scholarly world has been, at
times, almost inseparably linked. Initially, Wanamaker’s ambitions for rebuilding the
Globe found little support in the theatre communities and within the government; the
exception, he discovered, was with the academic community. As the Globe project
developed, Wanamaker gathered support and guidance from various fields. He also
brought theatre historians John Orrell and Andrew Gurr on board as principal advisors
for the reconstruction. Academics, therefore, had an early stake in the new Globe and
many felt that once completed the theatre should be used as much as possible for
experimental inquiry into the original conditions of performing Elizabethan and
Jacobean drama. Historically accurate productions, often focusing on a particular
element of performance such as costumes, dialect, or casting (all-male productions, for
instance) have been attempted multiple times, but the prevailing staging methods at

12
the theatre are not concerned especially with original Shakespearean conditions—that is, beyond the continual experimentation with the dynamics of the “original” space. While the new Globe has been influenced more than any other British theatre by academics, it is above all a professional theatre company aiming to sell tickets and entertain its audiences.

The RSC’s connection to the scholarly community has been far more tenuous. Scholars have not typically been involved in production work at the RSC, yet the literary study of Shakespeare’s texts have nonetheless greatly affected the choices made by the company in performance. Early RSC directors such as Hall, John Barton, and Trevor Nunn were university-educated men with little or no professional acting experience, a notable departure from the type of individual who had generally assumed the director’s chair prior to the 1960s. These new directors were influenced by academics such as F. R. Leavis and George Rylands, and they brought scholarly ideas about textual scrutiny to the performance of the plays. For the most part, however, the RSC has been selective about allowing academics to have input in production. Only a few, notably Stanley Wells, have worked with company members. (Academics and historians interested in Shakespeare’s life and works or in the RSC’s past, on the other hand, are welcome in Stratford and come often to the extensive and world-famous archival holdings located in the town).
Finally, it should be noted that the annual seasons of each company vary in length. The RSC produces plays year-round, moving specific productions from Stratford to London and Newcastle. The new Globe company, working in an open-air theatre, performs only from early May to October, though occasionally they tour during their off-time.

For this study, I am interested in how the two companies have constructed their identities in relation to Shakespeare’s significant locations. For that reason, I do not devote much attention to the fact that both the RSC and the new Globe regularly produce works from a wide range of playwrights, from other Elizabethan and Jacobean writers to contemporary dramatists. The Shakespeare Memorial Festival did focus almost exclusively on Shakespeare, but the RSC and the new Globe do not. The RSC’s record on this account is far longer and more diverse than the new Globe’s, but neither company is, or has ever been, solely dedicated to Shakespeare.

In spite of the companies’ various differences, their relationships to their significant geographic locations provide a unique point of comparison; one that has influenced not only their individual identities but also their current “competing” approaches to Shakespeare’s plays. I wish to show what these sites have meant for the RSC and the new Globe throughout their histories. In doing so, I will examine the notion of sacred place and space and how it relates to authenticity. The word

---

13 For this study I am using the terms place and space interchangeably, unless otherwise stated. Place tends to refer to a specific point, though space may as well. The term space is often used when describing the interior of a theatre—performance space, audience space, empty space, etc. Theories about space in geography, history, and performance studies have been addressed by many scholars in
“sacred” typically refers to religious places or objects, but its broader meaning easily encompasses the phenomenon that has developed in England regarding Shakespeare’s land and relics—all that remains for people to see and touch.

various fields. David Wiles’ discussion of space in *A Short History of Western Performance Space* was especially valuable in this study.
Stratford-upon-Avon is notable as the birthplace of William Shakespeare, and the Borough of Southwark, a section of present-day greater London, is known for being one of the first professional entertainment districts in England, one that gave rise to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. As such, the locations are, respectively, the birthplace and workplace of William Shakespeare. The evidence that remains from Shakespeare’s life reveals a few key places where he spent time; in addition to Stratford and Southwark, he worked on the north bank of the Thames at Blackfriars theatre and he lived for a time in a residence not far from St. Paul’s Cathedral. He also toured with his company. Nonetheless, Stratford and Southwark are the primary geographic areas currently associated with him.

The attributes of location—of birthplace and workplace in particular—attract people in regard to the legacies of many artists; Shakespeare, in this sense, is not unique. Every summer, for instance, thousands of opera-fans journey to Bayreuth for the annual month-long festival at Wagner’s Festspielhaus, the theatre he designed for his operas. Wagner was not from Bayreuth, but as his workplace the town has
acquired the sheen of cultural significance. ¹ Similarly, Salzburg is celebrated for its connection to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. In this case, he was born in the Austrian city, and the local tourist industry thrives largely on this fact. Salzburg is a picturesque place, which most certainly adds to the appeal. The city also now advertises its connection to the film *The Sound of Music*, but the distinguishing factor that the tourism and heritage industries extol and market is the city’s famous son.

The subject of geographic location also involves additional sub-topics: historical and theatrical spaces. Both Stratford and Southwark hold numerous historical spaces connected to Shakespeare’s life that remain from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In Stratford these include Shakespeare’s Birthplace; New Place, his home in later years; Hall’s Croft, where his eldest daughter Susanna and her husband John Hall lived; the house of his mother Mary Arden; Anne Hathaway’s Cottage, his wife’s family’s home; and Holy Trinity Church, where Shakespeare was buried. In addition to these public tourist sites, the Upper Guildhall of the King Edward VI grammar school also attracts attention for its most famous alumnus. In Southwark the historical spaces associated with Shakespeare are the archaeological sites of the original Globe and the Rose theatres. The area also includes Southwark Cathedral in which Shakespeare likely spent time. The current church building, however, has undergone extensive changes since his lifetime. The Bard may also have

---

visited the George Inn, located in Southwark. Here again, the current structure is significantly altered from the sixteenth-century version; the inn was rebuilt after a fire that occurred in 1676.

Stratford and Southwark also comprise several theatrical spaces that the Shakespeare Memorial Festival, the RSC, and the Globe have occupied over the courses of their histories. In Stratford these include the 1879 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, destroyed in a fire in 1926 and converted in 1986 into the RSC’s Swan Theatre; The 1932 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre designed by Elizabeth Scott, renamed The Royal Shakespeare Theatre in 1961; the Other Place, open from 1974 to 1989 and again in a new building from 1991 to 2001; and the Courtyard Theatre, a semi-permanent performance space built in 2006 to serve as the main house for the RSC while the Royal Shakespeare Theatre is completely renovated. (This study will also discuss London’s West End Theatre District, where the RSC leased the Aldwych theatre from 1960 to 1981, as well as the City of London, where the company occupied the main stage and a studio space of the Barbican Centre from 1982 to 2002.) Finally, Southwark, of course, contains the new Globe, which was completed in 1996.

Cause and effect relationships that operate between these historical and theatrical spaces, their larger geographic locations, and the Memorial Festival, the RSC, and the new Globe are not easily discernable. For instance, it is true to state that Stratford affected the choices that the Memorial Festival and the RSC made over the
years, such as how the companies appropriated or rejected the notion of heritage. It is equally true, however, that the presence of the Memorial Festival and the RSC altered Stratford. The RSC, for example, regularly draws international artistic talent to the town and it also feeds the tourism industry, attracting greater numbers of people to Shakespeare’s birthplace. Simply put, location, space, and theatre company continually influence each other.

The term theatre company generally refers to the many individuals making decisions within an organization. Often, when discussing agency in a company the artistic director is singled out as the primary instigator, which is useful for simplicity’s sake, but not especially effective in capturing the complexity of an organization such as the RSC or the Globe. Peter Hall, for instance, becomes almost synonymous with the RSC in the 1960s; in describing the company, it is easy to assume that his decisions, as opposed to those of other people inside the organization, or outside factors such as economics, account for the identity of the company. While the artistic director is undoubtedly vital to the larger identity of any company, I wish to show that location played a special role for the Memorial Festival, the RSC, and the new Globe.

The term location can also refer to individuals or groups of people. The Southwark Borough Council, the local inhabitants, or the Stratford town leaders all serve as examples. Often, however, location refers to the cultural, historical, and
geographic attributes of the area, such as the quaintness of Stratford, its distance from London, Southwark’s position across the River Thames from the City, or its history as an industrial neighborhood.

Theatre company and location as subjects are further complicated by the issue of perception. At times I will be referring to the objective qualities of each: for example, the sizes of the RSC and the Globe, their organizational structures, the individuals who run them, or in terms of location, the historical activity that occurred in Stratford or Southwark. Yet, this study also discusses people’s perceptions—the subjective qualities of the companies and their locations as viewed by spectators, critics, and scholars. How individuals perceive Stratford or Southwark has to do with a variety of factors, including their individual interest in or knowledge of Shakespeare and their beliefs about the significance of place.

The last factor, the perceived significance of place, is especially important in this comparison of the Memorial Festival, the RSC, and the new Globe and their two primary locations as they relate to the notion of authenticity. With the three institutions, as well as with Stratford and Southwark, visitors often sought, and continue to seek, authenticity—historical, artistic, or cultural authenticity, or some combination of all three. These different versions of authenticity all include in their definition the qualities of genuineness and legitimacy. Historical, artistic, and cultural authenticity do not necessarily refer to accuracy in representation or to something not copied, though definitions of the word authenticity often include these aspects as well.
The notion of authenticity has been much debated as various scholars have attempted to define and understand it as a motivating force for travel. Dean MacCannell points out that “Sightseeing is a form of ritual respect for society . . . and that tourism absorbs some of the social functions of religion in the modern world.”\footnote{MacCannell, Dean. “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings.” Vol 79, no. 3. \textit{The American Journal of Sociology}. 1973. 589-603.} Authenticity is a necessary component here because it “connotes traditional culture and origin, a sense of the genuine, the real and the unique.”\footnote{Wang, Ning.”Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience.” \textit{Annals of Tourism Research}. Vol. 26, no. 2. pp 349-370. 1999. 351-2.} Furthermore, authenticity may be differentiated into objective and subjective authenticity. The former refers to discernable qualities of an object or place. In Stratford, for example, Shakespeare’s Birthplace on Henley Street is objectively authentic in that it was indeed the home in which he was born. Subjective authenticity refers to an individual’s experience. Here authenticity becomes a much more complex issue; one especially relevant to relationships between the Memorial Festival, the RSC, and the new Globe and their locations. For instance, a traveler with little knowledge of Shakespeare will appreciate a production at the new Globe in way that may be completely at odds from the experience of the individual standing next to her—say, a student studying Shakespeare. Subjective authenticity, then, is tied to knowledge and expectations. It is also, therefore, linked to authority and legitimacy.
According to E.M. Bruner, authenticity relies on “authority or power, which authorizes, certifies, and legally validates [it].”\(^4\) He argues that “authenticity today is becoming a matter of the politics of connoisseurship, of the political economy of taste, and of status discrimination . . . it is a matter of power, of who has the right to authenticate.”\(^5\) Pilgrimage sites, such as Stratford and Southwark, are generally established due to the actions and events that occurred at the place. Often these sites are maintained by replicating the activity that made the place famous initially, such as the “original practices” performances occasionally mounted at the new Globe. Colonial Williamsburg or New Salem, Illinois (where Abraham Lincoln lived), are similar examples of historical pilgrimage sites that continue the activities of their “original” state. Of course, this last idea is again one of perception, filtered and structured by current understanding what that “original” state was: “The vocabulary of origins and reproductions and of authenticity and the inauthentic may not adequately acknowledge that both are constructions of the present.”\(^6\) Our historical knowledge of early seventeenth-century performance is based on the surviving evidence from the time period as well as on our present views of history—our perception. The new Globe is clearly based upon our current understanding of the past. Even the archaeological site of the Rose, for example, requires a modern assessment of the

\(^4\) Wang 354.
\(^6\) Bruner 409.
foundational evidence. These authentic locations are constructed and shaped by those in positions of authority, including scholars, artists, funding bodies, politicians, etc.

The idea of authenticity—objective and subjective—is central to my study of both the theatre companies and their locations. For now, I wish to focus on the locations; later chapters will address the separate histories of the theatre companies, including their continual appropriation of models, ideas, and principles of authenticity.

For Stratford and Southwark the historical connections to Shakespeare—the “authentic” connections—have meant that throughout their separate pasts, the areas have had to contend with people’s reactions to their famous inhabitant. Responses to the sites as sacred ground and as places for performance have vacillated between pious veneration to cutting degradation. Stratford and Southwark are layered with centuries of human valuation, most of it related to the single individual William Shakespeare. However, to state simply that Shakespeare’s life made Stratford and Southwark sacred, or for that matter profane, misses the more crucial element in the developments of both areas. The centuries of increasing veneration for the Bard, of curiosity about his life, and of love of his plays are what have made the two sites deeply significant. In addition, the relatively recent theatrical activity at both places produced by the Stratford Memorial Festival, the RSC and the new Globe, has provided another layer of sacredness. Legendary productions and performances that occurred at each site entice some visitors as much or more than do the facts that Shakespeare was born or worked in the areas.
As with any holy site, Stratford and Southwark have been marked by millions of travelers, enthusiasts, and pilgrims. The website for Shakespeare’s Birthplace, for example, informs visitors of the long tradition of renown pilgrims to the Bard’s first home; Charles Dickens, John Keats, Walter Scott, and Thomas Hardy are listed as a few of the more famous men who “left their mark” at the Birthplace, either by signing the guestbook or by etching their names into the glass window pane of the birth room.\(^7\)

In Stratford, the years of veneration for Shakespeare have developed into a near religion or, in more material terms, an industry. In recent years, Southwark too has been transformed by this religion, Bardology, and by the Shakespeare Industry. A relatively newly resurrected pilgrimage site, the borough is now likely being visited by the twenty-first century Keatses and Hardys.

In some cases the significance bestowed upon a place by the accumulation of veneration exceeds the initial importance it possessed. Anne Hathaway’s cottage on the outskirts of Stratford is one of the more popular tourist sites for travelers to the Warwickshire region. Yet she may never even have lived there and the anecdotes recounted in guide books and local lore about William and Anne’s courtship at the cottage are not based on any solid evidence. Nonetheless, the cottage is most certainly a pilgrimage site, as Scott Lash and John Urry describe:

> This building has been an object of . . . worship for generations. And this is part of the reason its value is assured. It is not that this particular building necessarily did have any particular connection to Shakespeare. It is rather that

---

it has been presumed for many years to have such a connection and the building continues to be celebrated because millions of other people have done so in the past.\textsuperscript{8}

Numerous factors have influence people’s attitudes over the centuries towards Stratford and Southwark. Shakespeare’s seemingly limitless popularity obviously has affected both places. His fame has grown steadily since his death, arguably ballooning during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries evidenced by the success of films such as Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 \textit{Romeo and Juliet} and the 1998 Oscar-winning \textit{Shakespeare in Love} (to name but two); with a surge in popular and scholarly biographies dedicated to his life; and with a proliferation of amateur and professional Shakespeare companies, especially in North America.

Likewise, the Bard’s reputation has affected both places, though in a more complex cause and effect relationship than his growing popularity. Seen as the epitome of high-brow culture and, paradoxically, as the playwright of ultimate universal appeal, Shakespeare is many things to many people. As we shall see, his different reputations—elite, egalitarian, poet of nature, poet of kings, etc—have at times either coincided or conflicted with people’s attitudes about Stratford and Southwark.

Finally, advances in transportation and technology have also greatly influenced people’s opinions about Shakespeare’s birthplace and workplace. For instance, as Stratford became more accessible over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth

\begin{footnote}
\end{footnote}
centuries, larger numbers of visitors from all over the world descended upon the town. Stratford, long considered an out-of-way, provincial village, has become a cosmopolitan center for the arts. Much of this shift, though not all of it, can be attributed simply to improvements in rail, car, and air travel. As with any small town, advances in technology, particularly in communications, have greatly reduced any sense of isolation that inhabitants or visitors may have felt in the past. Of course, these “advances” have come at what some people consider a negative cost. Stratford’s increased accessibility has meant bigger crowds and more tourist businesses.

The thriving tourist industry in Stratford has meant that while many people consider it to be a charming location, a number of others find it crowded and gratuitously Shakespearean. Located in the county of Warwickshire, near the Cotswolds, the town evokes the aura of “merrie olde England.” Although radically altered since Shakespeare’s time, the area purports to having maintained an Elizabethan essence. Mary Arden’s House, for example, allows tourists to “discover the daily routine of a sixteenth-century farm and marvel as the farmer, maid, and labourer bring the farm to life.”9 The “latest news” section of the Birthplace Trust website announces that visitors “are now welcomed to the [Birthplace] house by guides in replica period clothing.” (No one needs to question which “period.”) The

---

9 3 July 2007 <http://houses.shakespeare.org.uk/houses_arden.php>
Birthplace Trust also touts that “for the first time in 400 years, glove-making, the trade of Shakespeare’s father, John, will be carried out in the room believed to be the site of the original workshop.”

For much of its history, Stratford prospered as a rural market and crafts town, but the tourist industry has refashioned the town to include boutiques, coffee shops, souvenir stands, and an array of ethnic restaurants. Stratford remains architecturally and topographically quaint—especially for international travelers—with its green rolling hills and thatched-roof cottages. Hundreds of guidebooks praise its charms, even as they sometimes warn travelers of the overblown tourist sites. Novelist Susan Hill (who is, incidentally, the wife of famous Shakespearean scholar Stanley Well) published a guide to the area in 1987. The book, *Shakespeare’s Country*, takes a skeptical view of the Shakespeare shrines within Stratford: “Join a queue, march into the Shakespeare properties through the front door, in a crowd, determine to understand how it was then . . . and it will evade you and slip through your fingers, you get nothing at all.” Hill then insinuates that the “authentic atmosphere” can be found in the surrounding landscape. She offers a suggestion, drawn from pilgrims’ experiences in religious settings. Hill notes that visitors to the Holy Land also have “toured the sites wearily, the place of Christ’s Nativity, the Garden of Gethsemane” and felt “nothing.” The answer, she suggests lies in the following analogy: “But they [the tourists] have gone out in the country around [the Holy sites], sat by the shores of the Lake of

---

10 13 July 2007 <http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/content/view/655/426/>
Galilee in the cool of the early morning, broken bread, and then . . .”\textsuperscript{11} She finishes her sentence with an ellipsis, insinuating that the metaphysical qualities of the religious experience lie in the calm morning of the landscape. The River Avon, Hill leads readers to consider, might provide a similar experience.

Certainly, the aesthetic of Stratford and its surrounding area seems for some people to carry whatever “memory” of William Shakespeare might remain. This memory is culturally constructed; circularly constructed even: the town of Stratford is largely responsible for many of the current popular images or memories of Shakespeare. What William Shakespeare was really like as person, after all, is not especially important in this constructed memory, this “authentic” image. Authenticity in this regard is not about accuracy, “forever fixed in time,” but is, as E.M. Bruner asserts, “a struggle, a social process, in which competing interests argue for their own interpretation of history.”\textsuperscript{12} The “authentic” versions of Shakespeare as offered by the tourism industry in Stratford reflect the various qualities, positive and negative, of the town and its surroundings.

Southwark is a more densely populated and developed area than Stratford, and it holds far fewer Shakespeare shrines. In fact, none of the places associated with the Bard are still standing in their original form. Nonetheless, the neighborhood boasts possibly the most significant site connected to Shakespeare; it contains the remains of his theatre, the Globe. Currently only a plaque marks to spot. The precise location of

\textsuperscript{12} Bruner 408.
the theatre was finally determined 1989 when archaeologists discovered a small corner of the theatre, but due to heritage regulations protecting the building currently situated on the site, the Globe will stay buried—at least for the near future. The Rose Theatre site also lies within the borough of Southwark. It is a popular tourist destination: a substitute for visitors, in some ways, for the more famous Globe theatre.

Southwark is also a rougher place with a less romantic ambiance that Shakespeare’s hometown. In the early seventeenth century, the neighborhood had been home to Shakespeare’s company. In 1587, Philip Henslowe built the first theatre in Southwark, the Rose, and twelve years later, Richard and Cuthbert Burbage constructed the Globe theatre of which Shakespeare was part owner. From that point to the destruction of the theatres by Puritan leaders in the 1640s, the south bank of the Thames housed a number of the most successful Elizabethan acting companies.

The borough of Southwark has undergone drastic changes in the last decade that have made it a more desirable place for tourists to visit. After its brief reign in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as an entertainment district, the borough housed at various points in its history, brothels, prisons, factories, and docks. Not until the 1970s and 80s, beginning with Sam Wanamaker’s petition for the reconstruction of Globe, did circumstances begin to shift. In 1989, archaeologists identified the remains of the Rose theatre, and shortly after they pinpointed the site of the original Globe. These discoveries of the authentic places infused the area with what has been
described as a “tingle factor.”"\textsuperscript{13} The knowledge that Shakespeare and his contemporaries actually walked there provides a sense of awe for many people who have admired his plays.

Today the borough of Southwark carries the “memory” of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre world, and like Stratford, it helps to construct and perpetuate the current images of that world. Tourists who visit the London neighborhood and enter the Globe education center, for example, can learn about the bearbaiting pits that competed with the theatres for Elizabethans’ spare change. Much like tourists in Stratford, visitors to Southwark might also seek to experience a “spiritual” connection to Shakespeare. Globe director Tim Carroll noticed as much: “More than once I would come across tourists, from abroad or England, touching the wood in the [reconstructed] Globe and saying, ‘gosh to think this is the very wood,’ and I would say to them, ‘no it’s not at all.’” He added, “in fact, if they really wanted to channel the soul of Shakespeare they should go and touch the block of flats a hundred yards away [near Anchor Terrace—the actual site of the theatre] and see if they got such an interesting experience.”\textsuperscript{14}

The “memories” of Shakespeare and his world carried by Stratford and Southwark are somewhat at odds with each other. The aesthetic of the small Warwickshire town is of an Arcadian countryside, of “this blessed plot, this earth, this


\textsuperscript{14} Carroll, Tim. Interview. 16 August 2006
realm, this England,”¹⁵ which conjures up images of Shakespeare as a poet of nature and virtue. Southwark, on the other hand, invokes the gritty world of the city and of power struggles and desires. The portrait of Shakespeare derived from Southwark is that of a playwright and actor embracing the boisterous city around him.

These polar images are part of the personalities of Stratford and Southwark. The idea that places have historical identities has been discussed by geographers and historians, especially in modern times. They have argued that personality is the product of a location’s history, because “geography provides a passive stage upon which the drama of history is enacted.”¹⁶ Stratford and Southwark have acquired their individuality in large part through their relationships to Shakespeare and his followers, through the “drama” of Shakespeare’s legacy. The notions of birthplace and workplace likewise influence the areas’ identities. Birthplace is associated more closely with idolization of the man or myth of William Shakespeare, whereas, workplace is tied more to the production of his plays.

All of the places in Stratford and Southwark associated with Shakespeare evoke certain sentimental, historical, and aesthetic charms—the “tingle factor”—partly because they inspire in people’s minds a nostalgic view of the Elizabethan world. They conjure up a lost time—one that created the genius of Shakespeare. According to scholar Luigi Thomasi, “The importance of the aesthetic” in place or

---

location is as “carriers of the sacred . . . carriers of memory.”\textsuperscript{17} Through pilgrimages and tributes, as well as through dismissals and insults, people assign positive and negative significance to various places and things. Both Stratford and Southwark have received large shares of special association: for Stratford, over the last few centuries; and for Southwark, in the last few decades. The veneration given to William Shakespeare over the past four hundred years exceeds that bestowed on any other dramatist or poet, and it has elevated him to a status usually reserved for religious figures. As with saints and martyrs whose places possess special qualities for believers, Shakespeare’s birthplace and workplace provide for “believers” tangible connections to the Bard. Of course, many Shakespeare enthusiasts do not venerate his places. Some even consider the attention given to Stratford and Southwark inappropriate, and these opinions have affected the areas as much as the affirmations have.

The following chapters in this study will address in chronological order the relationships between Stratford and the Shakespeare Memorial Festival and the RSC, and between Southwark and the new Globe. For now, however, it important to note a few themes present in the interplay between location and theatre company, beginning with the way all of the locations and their companies relate to London.

Throughout the histories of both locations, the most influential attitudes—both positive and negative—about geography and cultural cachet have come from London, specifically from the capital’s critics, performers, wealthy patrons, and cosmopolitan audiences. Therefore, Stratford and Southwark have been largely defined by their relationships to central London. Geographically, Stratford is situated approximately 100 miles northwest of the capital. This distance, though relatively slight in the contemporary world, was significant during Shakespeare’s lifetime and well into the nineteenth century. Not until 1860, for example, did the railroad reach the town. Southwark, located near the geographic center of twenty-first century greater London, is situated on the south bank of the River Thames directly opposite St. Paul’s Cathedral and the City of London. Unlike Stratford, then, Southwark has never been difficult to reach from central London or considered provincial, but the borough was seen by those in positions of power as marginal. For much of its history, Southwark was a location for entertainment, industry, and slums, containing theatres, factories, prisons, and mental institutions, much of which fostered poverty and disease. The borough’s proximity and vitalness to the City of London and Westminster did not prevent wealthy and powerful people from deeming Southwark an undesirable location.

Professional acting companies have long sought homes in the heart of the capital; the location lends authority, large audiences, convenience for travelers and performers, and prestige. Shakespeare’s own company, the King’s Men, struggled
with approval to perform at Blackfriars theatre, an indoor space that James Burbage had acquired and began to convert in the late 1590s. Unlike the Globe, Blackfriars was located within the walls of the City of London, but because the theatre was part of a larger complex that had been a monastery, Blackfriars theatre did not come under the jurisdiction of the City of London. Initially, influential neighbors prevented the King’s Men from moving into their new space; not until 1608, when the children’s company using the space was closed down and the land was appropriated by the City, did Shakespeare’s company perform there. This example very loosely parallels what the RSC faced in its efforts, centuries later, to establish a London home. As soon as Peter Hall began his tenure with the company in the early 1960s, he insisted on finding a performance space in the capital. The company’s first permanent London base was the Aldwych, located in the West End Theatre district. Its second home was a purpose-built space within the Barbican Centre, an arts complex in the City, London’s financial district. Though the RSC stayed in the Barbican for twenty years, its tenure there was plagued with problems. The King’s Men’s experience with Blackfriars and the RSC’s history with the Barbican are connected only in that they demonstrate the efforts of both companies—at different times and under different circumstances—to find a “suitable” home in London, in a location sanctioned by government and business.

---

The new Globe also sought a sanctioned site, though in its case Sam Wanamaker and his team wanted a location approved by history, not necessarily by its proximity to London’s center of wealth and power (nor did he wish the theatre to be located conveniently in the established entertainment district of the West End). In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Southwark lay outside the formal boundaries of London. Entrepreneurs built theatres there precisely because the location was free from the influence of the City of London, yet still easily accessible for theatre-goers. By the 1970s, when Wanamaker began his serious efforts to reconstruct the Globe in Southwark, the area was well within the metropolitan bounds of greater London—if not at the geographic center of the burgeoning capital city. Nonetheless, in the mid twentieth century Southwark, especially the small slice of the borough across from St. Paul’s along the bank of the Thames, was hardly the most obvious location for a theatre; the area was economically depressed and possessed little of the necessary infrastructure for tourist activity. Wanamaker, however, insisted that the area was the appropriate place to build because of its past. Today, the borough has changed, of course, and Southwark is now a bustling tourist and artistic center in its own right.

The new Globe Company performed its first official season in 1997, and in 2000, the Tate Modern museum opened next door. The museum holds London’s largest modern art collection and has quickly become a favorite destination for tourists and art-enthusiasts. Also in 2000, the city unveiled the Millennium Bridge, a steel
suspension footbridge that connects the south bank of the Thames to one of London’s most famous landmarks, St. Paul’s Cathedral. Pedestrians walking southward on the Millennium bridge find a perfect photo opportunity waiting when they reach Bankside and turn to look back; the structural design of the bridge frames St. Paul’s Cathedral creating an attractive juxtaposition of London’s old and new architecture. The developments in the area have altered people’s perceptions of this section of Southwark. Arguably, the new Globe led the changes and is now situated in one of London’s most thriving neighborhoods.

Another important theme in the relationship between the locations and their theatre companies are the ways the RSC and the Globe appropriated the personalities of Stratford and Southwark, respectively. Stratford’s “rural innocence,” for example, has been altered by the RSC’s presence. The institution’s international cachet, its multi-million dollar operations, and its diverse group of employees have made Stratford a major artistic center. Southwark’s image as a marginal location likewise has been influenced by the presence of the new Globe. As noted, the theatre’s commercial and critical success has drawn attention and crowds to the neighborhood. Entrepreneurs have opened restaurants, pubs, and coffee shops, and the walkway along the south bank of the Thames connecting the new Globe to the Royal National Theatre is now a populated stretch.
However, when the Memorial Festival, the RSC, and the new Globe were founded, in the 1870s, the 1960s, and the 1990s respectively, they had to contend with the existing characteristics of their locations. To a great extent, their identities were forged by their early acceptances or rejections of different aspects of their locations, including the various images perpetuated about Shakespeare in each location. A crucial factor in their decisions was the way in which each company appropriated the notion of authenticity. After all, the companies were in the “authentic” locations, and these places presupposed certain expectations. The specific locations of Stratford and Southwark forced the Memorial Festival, the RSC, and the new Globe to address particular questions: for instance, would the companies explore Elizabethan staging for their productions; to what degree could they experiment with the plays; how reverential should they be with existing ideas about William Shakespeare; and how could they honor their locations without being defined entirely by them. How to construct their identities in relation to their authentic homes colored many of the companies’ foundational decisions.

Under the leadership of its first artistic director, Peter Hall, the RSC distanced itself as much as possible from the version of authenticity perpetuated by the Stratford tourism industry. Hall, especially, found the town’s veneration for Shakespeare’s land, buildings, and relics antithetic to his goals for the company. He wanted to promote the idea of Shakespeare as a contemporary playwright whose political and social commentary remained relevant and fresh in the second half of the twentieth century.
To emphasize this notion, he extended the RSC’s reach beyond Stratford by forming a second home in London. Through these efforts, the RSC defined itself largely in opposition to the personality of its location. The company also distanced itself from its predecessor, the Shakespeare Memorial Festival, the commemorative theatre that had prospered in the town since the late nineteenth century. The RSC eschewed the two major traditions of Shakespeare performance popular in the 1960s: lavish, pictorial productions descended from Victorian era realism, and Elizabethan-style productions promoted by William Poel in the early twentieth century, which sought to discover Shakespeare’s original methods of performance. The RSC supported historical research and education on Shakespeare and his contemporaries, but the company did not generally translate these efforts into its artistic work. Even the RSC’s Swan Theatre, an Elizabethan-inspired space built in Stratford in 1986, was never intended to replicate the authentic conditions of Shakespeare’s theatre. The company was not, after all, at the site of the Bard’s workplace; in Stratford, the idea of authentic primarily evoked the heritage of the birthplace.19

19 In recent years, a growing number of people have been debating the question of who wrote the plays attributed to Shakespeare. Clear evidence supports the fact that the man William Shakespeare was born in Stratford, but with people claiming that he did not write the plays, the town’s sacredness is also called into question. This attitude is a relatively new development in Shakespeare studies. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a poet named T. Seward confidently professed Stratford’s authoritative claim to fame: “Great Homer’s birth seven rival cities claim; / Too mighty such monopoly of fame. . . . / But happier Stratford, thou / With uncontested laurels deck thy brow.”19 A century later, these words are no longer true; some people do, in fact, contest the significance of the town. Nonetheless, the issue of authorship of the plays has not yet affected Stratford or the RSC’s presence there in any significant measure. The present debate, though, deserves mention in this discussion about sacred location.
One important exception in the RSC’s reaction to authenticity was its treatment of Shakespeare’s language. Early on, the company earned a reputation for speaking Shakespeare’s verse “correctly.” The RSC consulted experts and academics and, in the 1980s, members of the company led by John Barton, created the educational series *Playing Shakespeare*, which became popular with actors and teachers. The implicit claim was that the RSC had decoded the language and meter of Shakespeare; they had stripped away centuries of histrionic delivery to find an authentic style of speaking. In the *Playing Shakespeare* series, Barton even demonstrated the sounds of the Elizabethan dialect, though this style of speaking was not used in RSC performances. A more extensive discussion of the RSC’s attitudes about language is covered in Chapter 3. In terms of how location has influenced their choices, Colin Chambers has noted that RSC’s home “in the town of Shakespeare’s birth, itself in the heart of England” meant that the company could not “avoid being cast in the role of the nation’s Pythian serpent, guardian of the Bard’s flame and anointed declarer of prophetic utterances.”

Robert Shaughnessy has noted that birthplace and workplace offer “alternative versions of geographically grounded authenticity.” For instance, Stratford as birthplace did not prescribe a particular theatre space for the RSC, but it did help to legitimize the company’s claims about verse-speaking. Southwark as workplace, on

---

the other hand, did prescribe a theatrical space for the new Globe company. Today, Southwark professes its authenticity by highlighting the archaeological remains in the area. The sites of the Rose and the Globe are in the care of archaeologists and theatre historians, and therefore the information given to visitors of these places is “authenticated.” Shakespeare’s Globe conveys a similar sense of authority in its claims to authenticity. The new Globe explicitly states that it is not an “accurate” reconstruction of the Elizabethan Globe, but rather the best possible design that could have been engineered based on the current historical evidence. Rigorous attention to details went into the project, from years of research before the builders even broke ground to using Elizabethan artisan methods to raise the structure. The result was an Elizabethan-style theatre that surpassed in accuracy all similar projects that had been previously attempted in various places around the world. By admitting its possible flaws at the outset, the new Globe actually strengthened its ties to authenticity. Shakespeare’s Globe followed archaeological and historical procedure religiously, even to the point of stating the inherent obstacles that the historians, architects, engineers, and artists faced in the reconstruction. For instance, tour guides at the new Globe tell visitors that because of current London fire codes, the thatched roof on the theatre, which was meticulously crafted out of Norfolk Water Reed, had to be coated with a nonflammable chemical and fitted with a sprinkler system. The roof is therefore not “authentic,” but visitors leave feeling that it, and the rest of the building, is as close as possible to being so. Of the various locations around the world where Elizabethan
theatre replicas have been attempted—such as in Germany, Italy, Texas, and California—the south bank of the Thames arguably necessitated the strongest attention to accuracy.

Sam Wanamaker’s vision for the new Globe was not, however, of a reverential monument producing accurate Shakespeare performances. Rather, the structure was meant to support investigative work on the plays. Much like the concept of experimental archaeology, for example, where scholars build millennia-old tools or boats and then test them, part of the new Globe’s mission was to house experimental productions. Under Mark Rylance, the Globe’s first artistic director, the company occasionally subscribed to what they call “original practice” methods for the productions. The majority of productions, though, have not been done in this manner, and as noted, the theatre produces plays by dramatists other than Shakespeare. Nevertheless, all endeavors at the theatre seek to understand the dynamic of Shakespeare’s playhouse. The new Globe has tried to learn more about the plays by exploring the original space for which they were written, in the geographic location of that original space. The topography and the climate of Southwark, then, can even serve the current “experiments” in the space.

In exploring “authentic” space, the new Globe also turned its attention to what for almost four decades had been the specialty of the RSC: language. In 2004, the Globe company presented three special performances in what they called “original pronunciation” of its summer production of *Romeo and Juliet* The actors were
coached for the event by linguist David Crystal, who later wrote *Pronouncing Shakespeare: the Globe Experiment*. Where the RSC had toyed with the idea of original dialect in workshops and classes, the new Globe implemented it in production. The Globe actors and directors considered their three-show experiment with *Romeo and Juliet* such a success that they produced a longer run in original pronunciation of *Troilus and Cressida* in their 2005 season.

For the new Globe, performing in original pronunciation was again about experimentation, and was legitimated by space and location. In this particular case, it was about playing with sound inside a version of Shakespeare’s own instrument—the theatre for which he wrote his “music.” As this example illustrates, the new Globe has embraced the notion of authenticity on its own terms. A large part of the company’s identity has been shaped by its very efforts to define authenticity as a notion to explore rather than to achieve or to proclaim.

While the RSC and the new Globe are not in direct competition with each other, they inevitably face similar issues in dealing with Shakespeare’s plays, performed in special places. Arguably, both of them prosper from the other’s success due to the public’s seemingly limitless interest in Shakespeare. Even though each year a few critics call for a moratorium on Shakespeare’s plays, their suggestions have come to no avail so far, and the companies continue to prosper. In fact, in 2006-07 the RSC’s sought to reaffirm its leadership among Shakespearean companies. For its 2006-07 season, the company presented its most ambitious project to date, *The*
Complete Works Festival. The unprecedented year-long event held in Stratford included productions of all of Shakespeare’s plays as well as performances of his poems. The RSC produced roughly half of the shows and invited various British and international companies to Stratford to do the rest. The RSC offered a production to the Globe company, but after consideration, they declined. With the Festival, the RSC openly asserts that Stratford is the center of Shakespeare performance.

In addition to the festival, in 2007 the RSC began an ambitious £100 million refurbishment of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, which is scheduled for completion in 2010. How much the RSC’s recent decisions have been affected by the growing success of the new Globe is questionable. Yet, it is difficult to dismiss the new theatre’s influence when observing the architectural choices recently made by the RSC. Once the renovations of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre are completed, the RSC will no longer possess a single theatre with a proscenium arch. Certainly, the presence of the new Globe in London is influencing production and architectural choices in various ways in the larger theatre world; the RSC’s choices indicate that it is among those affected.

Typically, the theatre asks spectators to momentarily forget the geography and concrete architecture that surrounds them and step into the world of the play; as Peggy Phelan describes: “theatre architecture stages the paradoxical desire to set aside a space to explore being out of place, to inhabit, however fleetingly a kind of no-
place.” The may be true in many cases, but the RSC and the new Globe, each in its own way, have had to contend with a different phenomenon—the acknowledgement and reverence of their spaces and locations.

---

CHAPTER 2
THE SHAKESPEARE MEMORIAL FESTIVAL
AND STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 on Henley Street in the small Warwickshire town of Stratford-upon-Avon. After his long and successful career in London, he returned to his hometown around 1611 and seems to have lived the rest of his life there. He was buried in Stratford in 1616, in Holy Trinity Church. Because of these personal associations, his works are performed and celebrated in the town. However, not until 1879 with the opening of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre did Stratford gain a permanent space dedicated to producing the Bard’s plays.

Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries—and even to some degree for part of the twentieth century—the notion of performing Shakespeare’s plays in his hometown was considered by many people to be impractical, unsuitable, overly sentimental, unnecessary, or downright silly. A common attitude of the late nineteenth century, for instance, held that “Shakespeare himself had got out of Stratford at the first opportunity, and written all his major work in London, except ‘for the last six plays [here presumed to have been written in

45
Stratford], which exhibit a distinct falling-off.’”¹ The implication, of course, was that not only did the town have little or nothing to do with Shakespeare’s brilliance, but that, in fact, the location was harmful to his talent. This attitude was not held by everyone, certainly. Some people credited Stratford with providing Shakespeare with the inspiration for many of his greatest settings, including the forests of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *As You Like It*. The playground of his youth, proponents of Stratford argued, contributed immeasurably to the poet he would become.

We will never likely know how important Stratford was to Shakespeare during his lifetime. The epitaph on his tomb, however, invites conjectures about his ties to his final resting place. It reads: “Good Frend for Iesus sake forbeare / To digg the dust encloased heare! / Blese be y man y spares thes stones / And curst be he y that moves my bones.” These four lines have long been a matter of debate among Shakespeare scholars. They disagree about whether or not Shakespeare wrote them and, if he did, why. Some Shakespeare enthusiasts dismiss the verse as doggerel not “worthy” of Shakespeare. Others have argued that if Shakespeare did write the lines he meant them simply as a deterrent to anyone who might try to move his remains to a common grave outside of the church—a not uncustomary practice in the seventeenth century. Whatever the epitaph’s origin and meaning, though, in regard to the history of Stratford as a significant place for Shakespeare, the words suggest—albeit in an

---

amusing way—that the Bard was content to remain in the town. Yet, liking Stratford enough to retire and be buried there is different from deeming it suitable as a place for performance. As far as we know, Shakespeare himself never performed there.

In large part, the history of the performance of Shakespeare’s plays within Stratford from the time after the Bard’s death to the early twentieth century has been one of overcoming opposition voiced by critics, theatre practitioners, and audiences. For this period of the town’s history, logistical issues combined with people’s personal biases meant that Stratford witnessed very few performances of the plays. Located 110 miles northwest of London, Stratford was an inconvenient place for outsiders to visit. Moreover, many Londoners, whose tastes often drove cultural and artistic trends, maintained prejudices about the town’s provincial nature. In their minds, the location was unfit for “good” theatre. Audiences in the capital asked why anyone would wish to travel to Stratford to see Shakespeare’s plays performed when they could enjoy the “finest” productions of them in London. These critics also insinuated that the majority of the country folk of Warwickshire would have little interest in Shakespeare’s work; hence, there would be few people to attend and appreciate the plays.
These prejudices against Stratford are not surprising; any rural area would have been subjected to similar scrutiny (many still are today). In truth, Stratford simply did not have the resources or the numbers of people to support a permanent theatre. Up until the late nineteenth century, performances in the town had always been given by traveling players.²

Despite centuries of London prejudices and verbal attacks on the locals of Stratford, a number of town inhabitants were quite interested in Shakespeare. For many of them, their interests were rooted in financial opportunities related to the Bard. Over the centuries, many locals have made their livings selling relics, souvenirs, and tours of the town peppered with anecdotes about the local hero. These actions, while not directly opposed to theatrical production, contributed to Stratford gaining a reputation during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries as a place more suited for the idolization of the historical figure of William Shakespeare than for performance of his plays. Nonetheless, in the 1870s a local business man named Charles Flower took a particular interest in the performance of the Bard’s plays.

Flower proposed the building of the first permanent Shakespeare theatre in Stratford, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. Many people felt that his wishes were misplaced reverence. “Misplaced” is an apt word; exalting Shakespeare was never the

² Arguably, performances in Stratford today are still given by “traveling players” of sorts. The majority of RSC actors do not, of course, come from Stratford. Certainly the early performers at the Memorial Festival, such as Frank Benson, were brought in from the outside.
issue, but rather whether the idolatry should include producing plays in Stratford. To many theatre enthusiasts and critics, London seemed the only appropriate place for a memorial theatre dedicated to Shakespeare.

**Commemoration in Stratford: 1616-1879**

The first recorded opposition to Shakespeare’s plays being performed in Stratford occurred seven years after the Bard’s death, when his own company, the King’s Men, petitioned to perform. Town leaders, abiding by their Puritan views of the theatre, paid a fee to the troupe so that the players would not perform within Stratford. Nonetheless, the town’s resistance to hosting performers did not interrupt their efforts in honoring their famous son. By 1623, they had already paid tribute to him with a monument, erected near his tomb in Holy Trinity Church. These incidents were the first in what would become, over the next few centuries, the dominant trend in Stratford: veneration for the man William Shakespeare alongside opposition to the performance of his plays.

In 1630, an anonymous writer called Stratford “a town most remarkable for the birth of famous William Shakespeare;” but no performances of the plays occurred there for another century. Then, in 1746, John Ward’s “strolling provincial company performed *Othello*” in Stratford. Ward later wrote that their performance was given “as a benefit, for repairing [Shakespeare’s] monument in the great church . . . the

---

whole of the receipts being expended on that alone”\textsuperscript{5} In this case, then, the performance was primarily an act of veneration; its purpose being to save the monument.

By the eighteenth century, Stratford’s approach to all things Shakespearean was changing dramatically. The Bard’s reputation had been growing steadily in London and as a result, admirers were traveling to Stratford to explore the great man’s birthplace. They found a town increasingly dedicated to the worship of Shakespeare. Anecdotes and myths about the Bard abounded in Stratford, and relics associated with him could be purchased as souvenirs. Visitors were drawn to the town in hopes of learning more about the poet, and Stratford locals were quick to respond with the town’s commodities. One often-repeated anecdote serves as an example. Reverend Francis Gastrell, the mid-eighteenth-century owner of New Place, Shakespeare’s house in later years, apparently had become overwhelmed by “pilgrims” stopping by his home to see their hero’s prior residence and to admire the mulberry tree that Shakespeare was said to have planted on the grounds. Out of frustration, Gastrell cut down the famous tree. Legend proclaims that the townspeople, angry over the reverend’s rash act, smashed the windows of New Place. This vandalism, coupled with a land tax on the property that Gastrell found unfair, provoked him to demolish the

house. In truth, Shakespeare’s home had already been severely altered by a previous owner, John Clopton, and Gastrell’s destruction of New Place was not the bleak hour for posterity that the story implies.⁶

Gastrell left Stratford, never to return again, but before he did he sold the wood of the famous tree to Thomas Sharp, a local carpenter and carver, who made “mulberry wood knick-knacks.” So many of these items were sold over the following decades that skeptics soon pointed out that the tree simply could not have produced them all.⁷ The American author Washington Irving, who visited Shakespeare’s birthplace in the mid nineteenth century, jested that the mulberry tree seemed “to have as extraordinary powers of self multiplication as the wood of the true cross; of which there is enough extant to build a ship of the line.”⁸ The mulberry tree was serving the town as a resource, as did the “innumerable baubles” that the town claimed were linked to the Bard, including a “pencil case, walking-stick, gloves, brooch, table, spoon, and wooden salt cellars.”⁹ These items and others represented Stratford’s connection to Shakespeare; the town had the tree, the land, and all of the knick-knacks and stories that went with them.

⁶ According the Shakespeare’s Birthplace Trust, New Place had been build by Hugh Clopton sometime prior to 1540. William Shakespeare acquired the property in 1597. It stayed in his family until 1674, when the property was sold to Sir Edward Walker. He, in turn left it to his daughter, who was married to John Clopton. <http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/content/view/49/49/>
⁹ Schoenbaum 47.
In 1768, the wood of the “true” tree was used to court the celebrated actor David Garrick to come to Stratford and host what would become a defining event for the town, The Shakespeare Jubilee. Town leaders had decided to organize the celebration in order to raise money for the new town hall and to erect another Shakespeare monument. When they approached Garrick for his support and involvement in the jubilee, they sent their invitation with a gift: a carved box said to be made from the wood of the famous mulberry tree. Francis Wheler, the town councilor who wrote the letter of invitation, promised that “the story of the valuable relic” would delight Garrick: “the writer hereof flatters himself [the story] will afford you some entertainment, and at the same time convince you that the inhabitants of Stratford are worthy of your notice.”

Town leaders hoped that these “genuine” artifacts would entice Garrick and others to their commemorative celebration.

Garrick, a devoted Shakespeare enthusiast, agreed that Stratford was a special place and he accepted the invitation to organize and preside over the 1769 Shakespeare Jubilee. Yet, despite his participation, the event was a failure—at least in terms of advancing Stratford’s reputation as a place for performance. The celebration, which would include fireworks, public breakfasts and dinners, speeches, and a costume ball—but not, notably, any performances of the plays—had been hyped in the press for a number of weeks and, at its opening, expectations were high.

\[\text{Stochholm 7.}\]
\[\text{The Shakespeare Jubilee is credited by a number of historians of launching the full-scale commemorative tourism industry in Stratford. In this sense, of course, the event was a huge success.}\]
\[\text{Beauman 2.}\]
large number of people attended, many traveling the long distance from London to do so, but upon arrival they were disappointed by the accommodations in and around Stratford. They also soon discovered the lack of preparation in case of inclement weather—which, as luck would have it, descended on Warwickshire on the second day of the event. By the time the festivities ended, the general consensus reached by London commentators on the Jubilee was that Stratford was a backwards place not fit for a grand celebration. While none of the plays were to be performed, Garrick had planned a pageant of Shakespearean characters that would conclude with the crowning of the Shakespeare statue. However, when the rain arrived, the procession and crowning were canceled. The majority opinion of the London press concerning the Jubilee was neatly expressed by remarks that appeared in *The St James Chronicle*:

> The low People of Stratford upon Avon are without doubt as ignorant as any on the whole island. I could not possibly imagine that there were such Beings in the most remote, and least frequented Parts of the Kingdom. It is impossible to describe their Absurdity; and indeed Providence seems by producing Shakespeare and the rest of his Townsmen, to shew the two extremes of human nature.\(^\text{13}\)

Many Londoners’ convictions about the “least frequented Parts of the Kingdom” were strengthened when later in the year Garrick repeated his efforts in the capital. Though considered by many to have been a fiasco, the Jubilee had generated so much attention that Garrick—and others—produced follow-up productions in London. Garrick’s “afterpiece,” presented at Drury Lane, satirized elements of the Jubilee (he, too, accepted that all had not gone as planned), but the new production

\(^\text{13}\) Stochholm 110.
also included the pageant and crowning of Shakespeare’s statue that had been canceled in Stratford. In Garrick’s revised performance in London these moments were presented with reverence and pomp. Critics praised the efforts. The London event was unequivocally a success and was “performed more than ninety times to crowded houses during the [Drury Lane] season of 1769-70.”

Had weather allowed the procession and crowning to proceed in Stratford the way it was originally planned, the Jubilee might have fared better in the eyes of the Londoners who had come to Warwickshire. Regardless, the impression left by the cancellation of the Stratford procession and the success of the Drury Lane production was that Stratford could not compete with the capital when it came to celebrating Shakespeare’s work.

Nevertheless, the botched Jubilee in Stratford did not damage the town’s growing notoriety. Shakespeare enthusiasts had been traveling to Warwickshire long before the event, but after it the numbers increased steadily. Today, the Jubilee is acknowledged by many scholars as a turning point in Stratford’s history. For almost two centuries it colored many people’s attitudes about the town, both in terms of veneration and opposition.

---

14 Stockholm 165.
15 A humorous postscript to the Jubilee came in 2001, when the RSC paid tribute to the event by commissioning dramatist Peter Barnes to write a play about it. His satire, entitled *Jubilee*, included scenes between William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson; Reverend Gastrell and Thomas Sharp (depicting the chopping of the mulberry tree); and David Garrick and future RSC artistic directors Trevor Nunn, Terry Hands, and Peter Hall. In this last example, the future artistic directors visit Garrick in a dream as he is contemplating accepting the Jubilee project. Hall tells Garrick: “We’ve entered your dreams to thank you. From this jubilee there’ll spring a worldwide Shakespeare Industry.” Barnes’ play also
After the 1769 Jubilee, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, celebrations continued even as comments from London on the ignorance of the locals and the remoteness of the town persisted. In 1824, a group of Stratford locals formed the Shakespeare Club and organized the construction of a small, semi-permanent theatre on the grounds of New Place. From 1827 to 1872 the structure provided a stage for a number of London actors—those willing to journey to Warwickshire—but the theatre did not attract nearly as much attention as the periodic commemorative events that occurred in the town.16 The Royal Gala of 1830 was one such example. The Gala, which featured the usual assortment of public breakfasts, odes, processions, and firing of canons, was more decorous—though also less widely publicized—than Garrick’s Jubilee. Even though the 1830 Gala boasted the first major production of a Shakespeare play for a commemorative event in Stratford—*Richard III* featuring a nineteen-year-old Charles Kean—the program for the event did not even mention the captured the disdain that many Londoners had expressed about Stratford at the time of the event. In a scene between Shakespeare and Jonson, the Bard himself criticizes the town:

Shakespeare: So how is London?  
Jonson: Vile  
Jonson: Why live here?  
Shakespeare: It’s home.

performance. Indeed, not much was said about it. Kean was remembered more for his appearance in one of the processions of the Gala, in which he portrayed Saint George.¹⁷

Kean’s performance and subsequent performances in the New Place theatre were single events that did not generate much attention outside of Stratford. Though performances of the plays remained fairly inconspicuous, the town’s fame as a pilgrimage site was growing steadily. By the mid-nineteenth century, Shakespeare was firmly established as the national poet of Britain, and in 1847 the government acknowledged this position by purchasing his birthplace on Henley Street. From that point forward, the home would be preserved; it officially had become a national monument.

As the Shakespeare tourism industry was developing in Stratford, the town attempted another major celebration. In 1864, locals organized a series of events to honor the three-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth. The festivities included luncheons, speeches, and performances of the some of the plays. By this time, the railroad made travel to Stratford more convenient for Londoners and hopes were high in Stratford that the celebration would be a major success. But Londoners continued to dismiss the town. For example, The Times belittled the anniversary festivities in much the same way as critics had panned the Jubilee a century earlier:

---
We testify our gratitude to Shakespeare by calling for edition after edition of his works, by making household words of his language, and by claiming for him the first place among the poets of all time . . . of those who go from time to time, out of pure love, to see [his plays] acted in London, not one in ten thousand would go out of his way to see them acted in Stratford.18

Part of this reaction to Stratford stemmed from a larger bias against performance, which was prevalent in the nineteenth century. Some felt, as Charles Lamb had claimed, that the best place to experience Shakespeare was in one’s own study—in one’s imagination—and not in the theatre. In this sense, bias was not directed only at Stratford, but towards any attempt to stage the plays. The prejudice may have derived in part from the fact that throughout the nineteenth century performances of the plays meant severely cut versions of Shakespeare’s texts dressed in lavish sets and costumes. These spectacles became the standard for Shakespeare performance in the Victorian era. Despite the disapproval voiced by some people, these types of productions were often tremendously popular. Notable nineteenth-century performers such as Edmund and Charles Kean, and William Charles Macready drew critical and popular praise for their portrayals of many of Shakespeare’s characters.

Admirations and dismissals aside, lavish styles of production simply did not lend themselves to rural areas. Only London had the resources and finances to continually increase the level of pageantry that audiences had come to expect. Hence,

18 *The Times*, Oct 1864
many people felt that Stratford was not suitable for performance. In the last two
decades of the nineteenth century, the Stratford businessman Charles Flower would
manage, slowly, to change that opinion.

The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre: 1879-1932

In 1874, Charles Flower, a local businessman who had made his fortune as a
brewer, purchased two acres of land in the Bancroft meadow. The plot was situated in
a picturesque spot along the River Avon near Clopton Bridge, which had served as a
main entrance into Stratford since the fifteenth century. Flower gave the land to the
town council with the intent that it be used for the building of a theatre dedicated to
the performance of Shakespeare’s plays. The land had once been common pasture and
was not particularly valuable when Flower bought it. Nonetheless, he believed that his
donation of the property would spur enthusiasm and financial support for the project.
He also wanted the theatre to be built on a site owned by the town: a public place
dedicated to Shakespeare on his home soil. Remote Stratford, which by the 1870s had
been ridiculed for more than a century for its attempts to honor Shakespeare’s legacy,
would now have a permanent theatre, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

Flower immediately encountered opposition to the project and once the theatre
was completed he continued to struggle with practical issues of how and when the
space should be used. Dismissing his hopes and visions, some people argued that
audiences would not wish to come to the small town, and that locals could not
appreciate the efforts displayed there. Again, the distaste for Stratford seemed to be rooted in people’s notions of its provincial nature and out-of-the-way location. Londoners’ impressions of Flower did not help matters. His occupation, a brewer, seemed to those who did not know him to be at odds with his obsession for the “high culture” of Shakespeare’s plays.¹⁹

Yet, Flower also had supporters. Many people—among them Mark Twain—believed that the Bard’s works should be performed in Stratford. Those in favor of the project leaned heavily on the sentimental arguments for building a permanent theatre in the town, but they also maintained that a resident company at the theatre could produce innovative work and could draw audiences from all over the country and beyond. These ideas were supported by developing trends in production occurring in Europe. In the 1870s, Flower was aware of these changes and he spoke to his fellow Festival Theatre board members about the artistic potential of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. His goal was that theatre would house an annual festival with a resident company of actors. He based his ideals loosely on the Meiningen theatre company, which was located in a small German principality. The company, founded in 1866, had become famous for its ensemble work, and Flower argued that if the Meiningen troupe had flourished in a provincial setting, the Memorial Festival might prosper as well. He also cited Richard Wagner’s very recent success with the Festival

¹⁹ See Beauman 7-10 and Chambers 4, 12.
at Bayreuth, which opened in 1876. Flower envisioned that the Stratford theatre would be both a commemorative structure, venerating Shakespeare, and an artistic center exploring innovative performances.

Already, by 1875, Flower had formed the Council for the Shakespeare Memorial Association to supervise and plan the building of a “small theatre” that would present “occasional performances” of the Bard’s plays. Flower accepted that his dream of a resident company would take time, and that initially the theatre would open only for special occasions. The uncertainty about its function, however, did not limit the resources that went into building it. Flower spared no expense in constructing his ideal theatre. The Memorial Association Council invited architects to submit designs for the theatre. The selected plan, submitted by Messrs. Dodgshun and Unsworth of Westminster, combined Gothic revival influences, popular in the late nineteenth century, with Elizabethan half-timbering, evocative of Shakespeare’s era. In addition to the theatre space, the building included an observation tower, a library, and a picture-gallery. From the outside, the structure resembled a patchwork church with all of the individual architectural components of a house of worship. The observation tower looked somewhat like a steeple, the horseshoe-shaped theatre like a semi-circular chancel, and the gallery resembled a nave. These structures were assembled in an unusual configuration of styles and functions, as Sally Beauman points out:
The result, built of red brick with dressings of stone, was a weird and unsuccessful mixture of architectural styles, incorporating Tudor gabling, Elizabethan chimneys, Gothic turrets, and minarets. The theatre was flanked by a tall observation tower containing a water-tank for use in case of fire.  

The interior of the theatre, as one observer commented “resembled a non-conformist chapel.” The auditorium seated 700 people in simply decorated stalls and balconies. Unlike many late-nineteenth-century theatres, the Memorial Theatre was rather plain in its décor; the most prominent features being the stone arches at regular intervals around the seating. The stage consisted of a rectangular proscenium measuring 27½ feet in height and 26 feet in width.

Flower and his supporters had received plenty of criticism even before the theatre was erected; after its completion the complaints came pouring in afresh. Although the London Times pronounced the theatre “up to the standards of the Metropolis,” most assessments were negative. W.A. Darlington suggested that the structure “. . . looked like an ogre’s castle escaped from some German fairy-tale,” and Bernard Shaw famously quipped that it “was an admirable building, adapted for every conceivable purpose other than that of theatre.”

The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, with its fusion of nineteenth-century neo-gothic religious-inspired architecture and Elizabethan half-timbering symbolized the reverential relationship that Stratford had developed with Shakespeare over the years.

---

20 Beauman 12.
22 Beauman 12.
23 Beauman 24.
24 Bott 10.
The architecture expressed the cultural idolatry of Shakespeare, but also the confusing ideas on how to do justice the plays and methods of performance. The idea that theatres, like all architectural structures, hold cultural codes is addressed by Marvin Carlson in his book, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*. Carlson asks the question “what do theatres mean?” In the case of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, the religious overtones in the design signified the theatre’s original purpose of being a monument to Shakespeare and to the growing phenomenon of Bardolatry. This shrine-like quality was particularly evident given that the function of the theatre—to produce plays—was only utilized for the few weeks of the year surrounding Shakespeare’s birthday.

Yet, the Memorial Theatre was more than a dormant temple to Shakespeare. Flower and the Council had selected a design for a contemporary proscenium theatre, well suited for nineteenth-century productions methods. Flower might have chosen a different design altogether. He did not construct, for example, a replica of the Globe—an effort not unheard of in the nineteenth century, for one had been attempted in Germany as early as the 1830s. Nor did he build a typical nineteenth-century London theatre with elaborate interior décor. Instead, the Memorial Theatre captured Flower’s primary goals. The exterior of the theatre and its location provided a measure of symbolic importance for the performers and audiences. Regardless of taste, the theatre was acknowledged by many as being a grand structure. Its staid and reverential

---

appearance encouraged respect for Shakespeare, which in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant productions that adhered to proscenium staging and star performances. In turn, its interior, elegant but simple, offered a technologically up-to-date proscenium in which an ensemble might explore new ways of working on the plays.

The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, standing on the banks of the Avon, gave critics and supporters alike a clear understanding of what Flower’s commemorative act to Shakespeare entailed. He had built an imposing structure out of brick and stone that reminded onlookers of castles and churches, and yet all of this effort had been dedicated to a building that initially would open only once a year, for roughly one week.

The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre opened on April 23, 1879 for the Inaugural Festival. The celebration lasted eight days and included a luncheon, a concert, performances of *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Hamlet*, and *As You Like It*, and a recitation of *The Tempest*. Flower invited Barry Sullivan and his company to perform during the opening festivities. Sullivan was an accomplished and highly regarded actor, but in 1879 he was nearing sixty and was seen by many critics as past his prime. This perception influenced the London critics’ response to the Memorial Festival—here again, the main arbiters of artistic value came from London. On the whole, they applauded the theatre, but they denounced Sullivan’s performance of *Hamlet*, which was acted on the second night of the festivities. In fact, after the production of *Hamlet*,

63
the London critics went home, agreeing that they had seen enough. London critics left with their biases mostly intact; Stratford locals could build a theatre, but they could not fill it with good performances or sophisticated audiences. Colin Chambers points out that these “commentators were concerned to promote the nation’s capital as the only location fit for such a place of pilgrimage,” and that their biases were “the product of typical London-centered snobbery rather than a justifiable wariness of the curious quasi-religious approach that links a birthplace with the spirit of its celebrated offspring.”

When the Festival ended, the theatre closed until the following year. It reopened every year to celebrate Shakespeare’s birthday, but not until 1885 did Flower’s ambition for a resident company begin to take shape. In that year, Flower invited young Frank Benson and his company to Stratford for what would become an almost unbroken thirty-year annual residency at the Memorial Theatre.

Only twenty-eight years old when he made his first Festival appearance, Benson possessed many of the characteristics that Flower hoped to find in an actor-manager for the Festival. Benson had begun his career doing plays at Oxford. An enthusiastic leader, he acted, directed, and petitioned for support for some of his earliest theatrical ventures. His first major break came at the Lyceum Theatre in London with Henry Irving and Ellen Terry. Benson played Paris in their production of *Romeo and Juliet*. By 1885, when he first came to Stratford, Benson had already

---

26 Beauman 19-23.
toured in England and had assembled his own company. In meeting with Flower, Benson expressed a desire to create an ensemble-style of performance in which all of the members of the troupe would contribute, relatively equally, to the work. Flower liked what he heard; Benson’s ambitions fit Flower’s vision of a Meiningen-like company to occupy the theatre.

In practice, however, Benson ran his company more along the lines of the nineteenth-century actor-manager model, with himself in the lead roles. Nonetheless, Benson was devoted to Stratford and over the course of his tenure there, the Memorial Festival grew steadily in terms of attendance and reputation. His long-term collaboration with the town, however, did not proceed without conflict. In his memoirs, Benson recorded his time there as positive, but he also sympathized at some level with the Londoners’ prejudices against the town. Benson harbored a career dream of returning to and running the Lyceum Theatre. The London theatre had prospered as one of the most prestigious performance establishments in the capital under the reign of Henry Irving, the first actor to be knighted. Referring to his feelings in the 1890s, Benson wrote in his memoirs, “for eight years I had prepared for my pet scheme of establishing in London a theatre that should revive the palmy days of the Lyceum.”

In 1900, after Irving had left the famous theatre, Benson received his chance there, but he stayed for less than year. Critics were harsh, including the
successful London actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who also coveted Irving’s mantle. Beerbohm Tree declared that Benson should go back to playing in the country. Benson promptly did so, returning to Stratford.

Leaving London was not a complete disappointment for Benson. He had always admired the Memorial Theatre, calling it “up to the standards of the metropolis,” and “as complete, well furnished and equipped as money and artistry could make it.”29 The Memorial Theatre served his goals well. He aspired, for example, to produce all of Shakespeare’s plays, which he nearly did over the course of his time in Stratford. Benson’s productions, though sometimes derided by critics as being old-fashioned, elevated the overall status of the Memorial Theatre. For example, C.E. Montague described Benson’s performance of Richard II as: “faulty in some other ways, but always picturesque, romantic, and inventive, with a fine sensibility to beauty in words and situations and a voice that gives this sensibility its due.”30 In the first decades of the twentieth century, Benson enticed a few of the major London stars, including Ellen Terry, to make guest appearances in Stratford. The theatre afforded Benson certain luxuries; it allowed him to experiment with a number of the less-performed plays of Shakespeare, but it also fit the established Victorian and Edwardian style of performance that actors and audiences expected and embraced. Benson’s efforts were rewarded when he was knighted in 1916 on the stage of Drury Lane in London.

29 Benson 266.
While Benson appreciated the architecture of the Memorial Theatre for its practical purposes, he also admired it and its location in a more philosophical sense, as a monument to Shakespeare. He openly acknowledged the theatre’s stylistic similarities to religious shrines and churches. In a preface he contributed to the 1911 book *The Shakespeare Revival and The Stratford-upon-Avon Movement*, written by Reginald R. Buckley, Benson describes a “pilgrim” coming to Stratford and “visiting the theatre for the first time.” The fictional woman in his account drops “on her knees” and prays, “vaguely realizing” as Benson imagines, “that this Festival of Drama [at Stratford] may have something to do with the relation of man to God.” Throughout the preface Benson builds a case for the uniqueness and even superiority of a place such as Stratford for the performances of Shakespeare’s plays. He presents an idealized portrait of the town, where nature and man-made architecture combine to produce pure art. 31

As the Festival grew over the years, it expanded the length of its April season and, in 1910, added a summer season. The Memorial Theatre became a destination, prized even among the other “destinations” in Stratford. Tourists had long been able to visit the Birthplace on Henley Street, New Place, and Holy Trinity Church. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the Memorial theatre became as much a draw for pilgrims as these other Shakespeare shrines within the town.

New developments in rail transportation and growth in the travel and vacation industries contributed to the appeal of Stratford, as W. B. Yeats noted in 1911:

The easiness of travel, which is always growing, began by emptying the country, but it may end by filling it; for adventures like this of Stratford-on-Avon show that people are ready to journey from all parts of England and Scotland and Ireland, and even from America, to live with their favourite art as shut away from the world as though they were ‘in retreat’ as Catholics say. Yeats hoped that the new destination and the plays produced there would “help to break the evil prestige of London.” He and other supporters of the Memorial Festival emphasized the peacefulness of the location. Their perception of Stratford was of a festival with an untainted purpose of making theatre, rather than money:

One passes through quiet streets, where gabbled and red-tiled houses remember the Middle Ages, to a theatre that has been made not to make money, but for the pleasure of making it . . . nor does one find it [the theatre] among hurrying cabs and ringing pavements, but in a green garden by a riverside.

Yeats was not alone in rhapsodizing about the setting and naming it as the ideal spot to see a Shakespearean play. A detailed and affectionate account of the Stratford theatre experience is given by C. E. Montague:

A thing not easily to be spoilt for you in Stratford is the way you go to the theatre there . . . You go into it from a garden by a river, alive just now with little jocund noises; there is that sound which to hear is like drinking cool water in summer—the dip of oars and the little tinkle of laughter from people coming home in boats at twilight; beyond the stream some lambs are leaping about in a meadow of juicy grass . . . Wherever you look, behold! It is very good. Behind you the little ordered country town is in the oddly gay mixed light of lamps early lit and the lengthening daylight . . .


Yeats 146.
Montague then suggests that the playgoer is not the only one to benefit from this lovely scene; the actors take in the magic of the setting as well:

> When these things have possessed your souls with content, you go through a door and see, it may be, ‘As You Like It,’ acted by artists on whom they [the surroundings] are working too—at any rate you think so.

For Montague, the geographic and architectural elements of Stratford contribute directly to the enjoyment of a play. He further contends that the audiences—locals and visitors—truly appreciate Shakespeare, and that the Memorial Theatre provides a special communion between performer and spectator:

> The audience on the whole is picked and fit, for there is no mere fashion of coming here . . . no one comes who does not care for plays and acting; people laugh at the right place in comedy; the space between them and the actors is not the non-conductor of emotion that it often seems to be elsewhere; it quivers with communicative quickness; you do not have the sense that artist’s intention and public perception are fumbling for each other in a dark room; you feel the stir of a common intellectual excitement changing all the hard disparate atoms in the auditorium into one quickened brain whose joint apprehension is not, as in most theatres, the apprehension of the dullest, but that of the eager and clear.

According to these descriptions, the Memorial Theatre had succeeded in its purpose to serve not only as a shrine to the memory of Stratford’s favorite son but also as a space for the worship of the plays—a room that “quivered with communicative quickness.”

Of course, many people were not charmed by the large brick and stone structure or by the productions enacted there. Charles Showell’s 1925 travel guide, *The Shakespeare Country*, recommended that as visitors make their way to Holy Trinity Church, they “leave the Memorial Theatre behind, as it only serves to
introduce a discordant note into the melody [of the river].” He tells his readers that they should “look for something more picturesque” in the town.\textsuperscript{34} In 1925, Bernard Shaw applauded the Festival’s efforts, but complained about the theatre building, implying that it was not the dynamic space described by Montague, but rather a hindrance for actors and audiences.\textsuperscript{35}

Regardless, for forty-seven years the theatre hosted the annual Festival, which grew in popularity and, generally, in critical acclaim. In 1925, the British government granted the Memorial Festival a royal charter in honor of its nearly fifty years of productions.

Attitudes about the town did not change completely, though. The various opinions about the Memorial Festival came to a head in the early twentieth century when the theatre suffered a major catastrophe: On 6 March 1926, it caught on fire. The cause was never determined, yet the damage was considerable and very little was salvaged from the blaze. Archibald “Archie” Flower, Charles’s nephew and the presiding chairman of the theatre at the time, and William Bridges-Adams, the director of the resident company, quickly set about making plans to build a new theatre in its place. They organized extensive fundraising programs and held a competition to find an architect for the new theatre. All of this activity spawned a lively debate in the local

\textsuperscript{35} Beauman 92.
and London newspapers. One participant in the debate recommended that the new theatre be built, not along the banks of the Avon, or for that matter anywhere in Stratford, but rather in London.\textsuperscript{36}

Most people, however, no longer questioned the notion that Stratford could stage worthy productions, but many people were concerned about the architectural style of the new theatre. Shifts in attitudes about Shakespeare performance, which had been occurring in London and on the Continent, were now influencing the small town. A group of Elizabethan enthusiasts, for example, influenced by William Poel and his Elizabethan Stage Society, suggested that the new theatre in Warwickshire “should have an apron-stage, and no proscenium arch; it should be constructed in the Elizabethan manner,” and that it should be called “The Globe Theatre, Bankside, Stratford-upon-Avon.” The Stratford board did not accept the suggestion, but what to build as a commemoration to England’s most lauded dramatist was a question that was increasingly absorbing Shakespeare devotees around the country and especially in London. By the 1920s, a number of theatre practitioners in Britain had distinct views on how best to do this. Opinions on everything related to Shakespearean performance were being avidly discussed. Practitioners and critics debated issues including how to speak Shakespeare’s verse, how to dress, light and design the productions, as well as where and in what kind of spaces the plays might be produced.

\textsuperscript{36} Beauman 95-96.
Underlying this debate was the developing concern about whether Britain should establish a national theatre. The idea of a national theatre, which had been brewing since the mid-nineteenth century, had always been coupled with the idea of honoring the country’s most celebrated playwright. According to Colin Chambers, the national theatre discussion was “linked in one way or another to Stratford and the veneration of Shakespeare.” Chambers asserts that the very notion of a national theatre “was triggered by the purchase [in 1847] of Shakespeare’s Birthplace.” The connection was tenuous, though. The government’s interest in protecting Shakespeare’s birthplace in Stratford was not akin to wanting to locate a national theatre in the town.

In 1926, after the fire at the Memorial Theatre—and eighties years after the purchase of the Birthplace—when Archie Flower and William Bridges Adams were grappling with what design to use for the new Memorial Theatre, the consensus regarding a national theatre was that if the project were realized, it should be built in London. However, agreement about its general location—somewhere within the capital—was all anyone shared. The changes occurring in methods of Shakespearean performance in the early 1900s, which were affecting the national theatre deliberation, were also influencing the efforts in Stratford. Even though the Memorial Theatre would not serve as a national theatre, the discussions surrounding it dealt with many of the same issues facing Flower and Bridges Adams.

---

37 Chambers 24
One of the leading advocates in Britain for Shakespeare performance reform was William Poel, who promoted a return to Elizabethan staging methods. Poel was reacting in part to the lavish Shakespeare productions that had been popular in London in the mid to late nineteenth century. According to Poel, these productions by actors such as Henry Irving and Charles Kean, cut the original texts to a fault and obscured the language and beauty of Shakespeare under extravagant scenery and histrionic performances. Poel also took issue with the proscenium theatre and preferred instead platform stages and unconventional spaces. Although, for the most part, his company performed in London, he experimented with a variety of locations and spaces, some of which were outside of the capital. While he did not express an interest in working in Stratford for the sentimental reason of it being the Bard’s birthplace, he did bring two productions to the small town: Measure for Measure in 1908 and the then rarely-performed Troilus and Cressida in 1913. Poel also staged plays in Oxford. The significance of Shakespeare’s birthplace was not the primary draw for Poel; rather he favored places, such as Oxford, which provided communities conducive to his new, experimental projects. Poel was not especially interested in nostalgia. His Elizabethanist approach attempted to “translate” the plays for the modern world. By rediscovering “original” staging methods, Poel hoped that the plays would reveal more of their original beauty.

---

38 Beauman 59.
This attempted recapturing of the Elizabethan essence was not the same as the more sentimental Elizabethanism that existed in the tourism industry of Stratford. Poel’s approach was all about performance and the poetic language of Shakespeare; while Stratford’s interest in Shakespeare’s era was quite separate from work being done on stage at the Memorial Festival. Stratford offered little in terms of “authentic” productions; if anything, critics claimed that the town’s devotion to its shrines seemed to interfere with its ability to interpret the plays. Poel’s Elizabethan movement highlighted this disconnect in Stratford. Of course, not everyone agreed on the disparity. Reginald Buckley, for instance, retorted that “Stratford is not building upon unholy foundations a fool’s paradise, but awakening traditions, clothed in the warm flesh of a living and throbbing actuality.”

Poel’s views influenced many people who were heavily involved in developing new ways of approaching the plays and also in the national theatre debate. Harley Granville Barker, one of the most highly-regarded theatre practitioners in London in the early twentieth century, had worked with Poel and acknowledged him as a mentor. In 1907, Barker and William Archer published *Scheme and Estimates for a National Theatre*. Their proposal outlined a plan for a national theatre in London, and it included in its pages everything from a possible first season repertoire to the potential costs for such a project. Archer and Barker’s plan did not succeed, but their comprehensive outline did influence the organizational structure of the future national

39 Buckley 116.
theatre (eventually established in 1963), and their ideas guided much of the thinking
about performing Shakespeare in England. Barker agreed with Poel that the
nineteenth-century methods of staging were obscuring important aspects of the plays,
but he differed somewhat from his friend’s opinions on the Elizabethan approach. For
example, in 1912, Barker staged an innovative production of *The Winter’s Tale*
at the
Savoy Theatre that was “consciously intended to shock its audience.”

Barker, who had been influenced by the German director Max Reinhardt and by modern art
movements, altered the stage of the Savoy to conform more to a thrust configuration
(as Poel had often done). He staged the entire text of the play without any significant
cuts and, with designer Norman Wilkinson, he costumed the show in eclectic, non-
realistic attire.

This production, along with two subsequent productions of *Twelfth Night*
(1912) and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1914) were remarkable for a number of
reasons. Attuned to the shifting notions about how to perform Shakespeare’s plays,
Barker’s most lasting effect was that he broke with nineteenth-century pictorial
realism and historical antiquarianism. His reasons for doing so were partly practical.
Barker’s understanding of spatial dynamics and the demands of Shakespeare plays led
him to re-examine staging methods, in much the same way that Poel and the
Elizabethanists had. Barker believed that the “very advantages of the modern

---

[proscenium] theatre” were in fact drawbacks to staging Shakespeare. He described the disadvantages using the metaphor of Shakespeare as a “square peg” being fitted into a “round hole.”

These various issues figured into the debate about the reconstruction of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. With the first four decades of the Festival, “remote” Stratford had surpassed many people’s expectations, and now with the future of its theatre in contention, the various debates about performing Shakespeare crystallized in the search for a new architectural design. Also, after the government had granted the Memorial Festival a royal charter in 1925, its developing mission became increasingly ambitious in nature. The board and various directors aimed to house a permanent resident company that would produce the highest quality Shakespeare. These aspirations were in competition, in part, with the goals of many London theatre practitioners. Moreover, the success of one London theatre in particular, the Old Vic, set the standard that many Shakespeare repertory companies would seek to emulate. Lilian Baylis, at the helm of the Old Vic, had managed to produce all of Shakespeare’s plays over the course of a decade, from 1914 to 1923.

The suggestion, noted earlier, of “The Globe Theatre, Bankside, Stratford-upon-Avon” typified the changes that had developed in theatrical practice as promoted by William Poel, and it symbolically linked London with Stratford in the pairing of Bankside, a reference to the Thames, with the River Avon in Warwickshire. Archie

---

Flower and Bridges-Adams might well have tried to connect Stratford to London in this metaphorical sense. For example, they might have tried to build a replica of Shakespeare’s original theatre. One already had been constructed in 1912 for an exhibition in London at Earl’s Court. It influenced a number of theatre practitioners including Patrick Kirwin, who, in 1914, substituted as director of the Stratford Festival while Frank Benson was on tour in the United States. Kirwin brought his ideas of Elizabethan staging methods with him to Festival. For instance, “three trumpets blasts outside the theatre” signaled the beginnings of the plays, “antique instruments” replaced the orchestra, and Kirwin used Elizabethan costumes throughout.  

Yet, more than a decade later, the Memorial Festival was moving in a different direction. Stratford was not, after all, the original site of the Globe, and the Festival board members decided instead on a modern design for the new Memorial Theatre. After reviewing the many submissions, they selected one that they hoped would lead the Festival forward. The new theatre would be, as Archie Flower described it, nothing less than “the most modern and best equipped theatre in the world.” The Festival was arming itself against the criticism of its provinciality that it had endure for so long, and it was distancing itself from the old fashioned reverence for which it had become famous.

42 Mazer 76.
43 Beauman 101.
The New Modern Theatre: 1932-1959

The new Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, which opened in 1932, did not break with tradition as much as appearances might first have suggested. Archie Flower, who presided over the Festival for forty years, from 1903 to 1944, was conservative in his approach to production and management. For instance, as had been the case with the inauguration of the first building in 1879, the new theatre opened on the anniversary of Shakespeare’s assumed birthday, 23 April. The reverential function of the Festival remained intact.

Nonetheless, Archie and the board of governors forged ahead when they selected the winning design for the new theatre from a young “avowed modernist” architect named Elizabeth Scott. Her plan was for a state-of-the-art theatre, resembling in some observers’ minds an ocean liner “tethered to the banks of the Avon,” with a “great fan-shaped auditorium bell[y]ing] out along the river.” The building was “uncompromisingly of the machine age;”\(^\text{44}\) the exterior was simple and unadorned, but also massive and modern.\(^\text{45}\)

William Bridges-Adams, who had been director of the Festival since 1919, was highly involved in the design of the new theatre. He envisioned a space that would allow for both Elizabethan and pictorial staging. Archie Flower agreed and organized a tour of the finest theatres in Europe to inform their efforts. Although typically

\(^{44}\) Beauman 100.

\(^{45}\) What remained after the fire of the first Memorial Theatre stood adjacent to the new one, and was used initially as a conference hall, then as rehearsal space (and eventually, in the 1986, as the site for the new RSC Swan theatre).
conservative with funds, Archie Flower accepted that the quality of the new theatre would greatly influence Stratford’s future. The two men, working with the architects, gathered advice from designers and directors across Europe and in England, including Harley Granville Barker and Norman Wilkinson. Bridges-Adams asserted that the theatre should “offer Mr. Poel an Elizabethan stage after his heart’s desire,” and that it “should be no less adequate to the requirements of Professor Reinhardt,” the great German director who had been one of Harley Granville Barker’s biggest influences. In trying to create a malleable space, however, the architects and designers succeeded only in building a fixed proscenium stage that Bridges-Adams later described as the one theatre in all of England in which “it is hardest to make an audience laugh or cry.”

The interior of the theatre had numerous problems. There was a sizeable gap between the proscenium and the first row of seats, sight lines from the balcony were “disastrous”, and the backstage space was inadequate. Some critics remarked that the theatre resembled a cinema; the influence was not surprising given the profusion of movie houses built in the early twentieth century. The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre’s art deco interior also upset many traditionalists. Sir Edward Elgar, upon seeing the sleek “fawn-colored brick walls” of the foyer, the “ebony doors with . . . finger-plates in aluminum,” and the “stainless steel and green Swedish marble” leading into the auditorium, pronounced that building was so “unspeakably ugly and

---

46 Account of the Elizabeth Scott Memorial Theatre comes from Sally Beauman 100-114 and Dennis Kennedy 123-4.
47 Adler 21.
wrong” that he “very probably would be unable to eat for a month.”

Others praised the unadorned look. Many modernists were thrilled to see such a structure in quaint Stratford.

The official opening of the theatre drew unprecedented attention to the town. The Prince of Wales flew in for the ceremony in his monoplane, London critics descended on Stratford, and the event was broadcasted by the BBC radio. History repeated itself, though; all of the fanfare led to high expectations, and ultimately critics were disappointed by the productions. Bridges-Adams had not had adequate time to prepare for the opening. He had felt pressure to make the productions as impressive as the new theatre, but the money that went into them was spent on lavish sets instead of needed rehearsals. Londoners, especially, were unimpressed. In many people’s eyes, Stratford had proven yet again its ability to build a monument to Shakespeare; however, it had not managed to present anything particularly interesting inside it.

Bridges-Adams continued as director only until 1934. His replacement was Ben Iden Payne, a follower of William Poel. The new Memorial Theatre’s proscenium stage, enhanced with the latest design technology, did not suit Iden Payne’s vision for the Festival. In his first year, 1935, he attempted to alter the dynamic of the theatre by constructing a semi-permanent, Elizabethan-style stage under the proscenium arch. His structure failed in that much of the set could not be seen by audience members in the dress circle and upper balcony. In the very same season, Russian director Theodore

---

48 Beauman 110.
Komisarjevsky, who had worked intermittently as a guest director in Stratford since 1932, produced an avant-garde production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Iden Payne and Komisarjevsky gave audiences radically different styles to assess, and the consensus was that neither director had succeeded. Komisarjevsky’s productions were lauded by some critics, but they did not find favor with more traditional Stratford Festival goers. Some even openly expressed outrage.49

In many ways, Iden Payne’s directorship in the 1930s typified the problems facing the Memorial Festival in the mid-twentieth century. The new theatre appeared modern on the outside, but its proscenium stage, which had been intended to serve the ground-breaking staging methods developed by directors such as Max Reinhardt and Granville Barker, initially presented only traditional pictorial Shakespeare. Komisarjevsky experimented with staging methods popular in elite circles in London and Europe, but his style did not exactly fit the Festival. Iden Payne’s efforts to change the methods of Benson and Bridges-Adams simply confused the situation. He tried to present “new” Elizabethanist techniques on the Memorial stage, but by 1935 these were no longer, in fact, new. After four decades, they had become, as Sally Beauman declared, “fossilized.”50

50 Beauman 145.
Despite the Festival’s artistic floundering, in the thirties and forties Stratford’s profile as a suitable place for performance had become well established. The Festival’s coffers were full (though Archie Flower tightly managed all spending), it boasted a well-equipped, brand new theatre, and it was attracting large audiences. In 1936, 150 seats were added to the auditorium of the Memorial Theatre. Over the next ten years, the numbers of tourists coming to Stratford to visit the Shakespeare shrines steadily increased, and largely because of this the Festival never wanted for new audiences. Expanding its popular appeal, however, had not been the problem of the Memorial Festival. Finding favor with the theatre world had, and its members were not altogether convinced of the artistic merit of the Festival. Peter Brook, who would help shape the future Royal Shakespeare Company, came to Stratford in 1945 and years later noted his first impressions in his famous book *The Empty Space*: “every conceivable value [in the Stratford Festival] was buried in deadly sentimentality and complacent worthiness—a traditionalism largely approved by town, scholar and press.”

Barry Jackson, who brought Peter Brook to Stratford, took the helm of the Festival in 1945. His resume was impressive, having established the “first purpose-built repertory theater in the country,” the Birmingham Repertory. Jackson had won critical acclaim in the twenties and thirties by staging Shakespeare as if he were a contemporary playwright. He set the plays “in the present and act[ing] them like

---

51 Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. N.Y.: Atheneum, 1968. 46
Chekhov or Noel Coward."\(^{52}\) During his time in Stratford, Jackson also benefited from working with the new chairman of the Festival, Archie’s son Fordham Flower, who was more progressive than his father in his attitudes about production.

Jackson and his successors, Anthony Quayle and Glen Byam Shaw, increased Stratford’s acclaim by hiring many of the top actors in Britain. The Festival became increasingly reliant on a star system, bringing in ‘names’ from London. Jackson also successfully broke into the capital’s theatre world, touring Memorial Festival productions in London in 1946. Critics were impressed, with one commenting that “London people who want to see Shakespeare should not miss this visit from Stratford-upon-Avon.”\(^{53}\)

By the 1950s, the question for Stratford was how ambitious a future should it aspire to have. The Memorial Festival was undoubtedly a major British theatre, regularly featuring many of the most well-known actors and directors of the time, and attracting a diverse audience. The novelist Evelyn Waugh captured the general atmosphere of this time period in the Festival’s history in a short piece about Peter Brook’s 1955 production of *Titus Andronicus*. Waugh was impressed with the performances of Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in the production. He also commented on the make-up the audience: “Dense, devout, heterogeneous, American, negroes and orientals, little girls and grandfathers, [the audience] extended without a

\(^{52}\) Kennedy 110.  
\(^{53}\) Beauman 185.
gap from wall to wall and from floor to roof.” Waugh wondered how many of the audience members were in attendance “by habit,” implying that Stratford—the town, not the theatre—was the main draw for many visitors. He insinuated that, at least for some spectators, the production, despite its fine performers and production quality, was part of a larger pilgrimage to Shakespeare’s birthplace. (Olivier’s substantial reputation as a Shakespearean actor, augmented by the critical and popular success of his film versions of *Hamlet, Henry V*, and *Richard III*, also undoubtedly attracted many members of the audience as well.)

The Memorial Festival’s success and authority ultimately lay with its location. Anthony Quayle, who served as artistic director of the Festival from 1948 to 1956, conceded as much even as he attempted to balance the dual responsibilities of Stratford: commemoration and artistic growth. Quayle realistically judged the failings of the Memorial Festival, but he also dearly loved its sentimental ties to the Bard’s hometown. In his autobiography, Quayle recounts a visit to one of the Shakespeare shrines of Stratford:

I went up to London and brought them both [Dot and Rosana, Quayle’s second wife and daughter] down to Stratford and in the spring entered Hall’s Croft, the old house that had once belonged to Shakespeare’s daughter Susanna, who was married to Dr. Hall. . . . you could almost hear the woodworm squiggling about in the beams. But for us it was like a dream come true. Into this very hallway, over these very flagstones, up that wide oak staircase, Shakespeare himself had

---

walked to visit his daughter and his grandchildren. Outside in the garden was a mulberry tree that, as legend had it, was planted by Shakespeare. I had come to a place where I felt I truly belonged.\textsuperscript{55}

These spiritual feelings influenced Quayle’s sense of purpose at the Memorial Festival—as they had done for so many before him—but they did not cloud his assessment of the Festival’s resources or its future. A place such as Stratford, with its quasi-religious connection to England’s secular saint deserved, he felt, a better performance space. Although Quayle discussed with Tyrone Guthrie the possibility of an Elizabethan inspired theatre for the Memorial Festival, and even presented a sketch to the Stratford board, he was able only to make a number of alterations to the current Memorial Theatre. Quayle renovated the dress circle “so that it curved gently towards the stage,” to create more intimacy between the performers and audience. “Side boxes were added along both walls, and 135 seats were added to the front of the stalls, increasing the seating capacity to 1,377 and shortening the gap between stage and audience.”\textsuperscript{56} Quayle explained his alterations, asserts that “the building was of a hideousness that nobody who had not sat in it at that time could possibly appreciate.” He added that “it was built like a cinema, a long shoe box of a place. . . . The dress circle was set so far back that you were almost sitting outside of the theatre.”\textsuperscript{57}

As demonstrated by Quayle’s renovations, progress for the Memorial Festival in the 1950s came through minor changes and variations, which suited the conservative and commemorative atmosphere of Stratford. Yet many in the theatre

\textsuperscript{55} Quayle, Anthony. \textit{A Time to Speak}. London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1990. 318
\textsuperscript{56} Adler 21-2.
\textsuperscript{57} Quayle 322.
world saw the potential for a different path for the Festival. Quayle noted in his autobiography that “with one big effort, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre—a well-thought of, well-respected, but always slightly provincial theatre—could be turned into the foremost English theatre.” In order for that to happen, the Shakespeare Memorial Festival—the endeavor that Charles Flower had begun in the nineteenth century—would need, nearly a century later, to completely reassess the connection between Stratford and the performance of Shakespeare’s plays.

Case Study: The Shakespeare Memorial Festival and the Stuffed Stag

One of the more popular of Shakespeare’s plays with Stratford audiences has long been *As You Like It*. The play was first performed in the town in 1827 in the garden of New Place. It was chosen again to be part of the tercentenary birthday festivities of 1864, and it was among the plays performed during the opening week celebration of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1879. As *As You Like It’s* prevalence in Stratford’s performance history is partly due to the play’s setting, the Forest of Arden. Though depicted in the play as home to olive and palm trees and—of importance to the plot, a lion—the Forest of Arden is nonetheless reminiscent of the Warwickshire countryside, complete with shepherds, deer, and cottages. The location also takes the very same name as the land that lies directly to the north of Stratford-upon-Avon.

---

59 Scholars also associate the play’s setting with France’s Forest of Ardenne.
In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this connection between the play’s setting and Shakespeare’s native countryside was often commented upon. Travel writer and biographer Edgar Fripp insisted that Celia’s reference to the “sheep-cote fenced about with olive trees” was “unmistakably” Anne Hathaway cottage.\(^{60}\) Fripp’s deduction was not unusual; Shakespeare biographers commonly read personal information from the plays. In the 1870s, Edward Dowden assumed that Shakespeare must have written *As You Like It* while actually in the Forest of Arden, near Stratford.\(^{61}\)

The special geographic quality of play explains in part how Barry Sullivan’s 1879 *As You Like It* and Frank Benson’s revivals of it (24 revivals between 1885 and 1918) became linked to a famous anecdote about Shakespeare’s life. Local legend had it that young William had once poached a deer from the nearby estate of Sir Thomas Lucy. The story arose from Stratford gossip, was embellished over the years, and was even used to provide an explanation for why Shakespeare had initially left Stratford for London. According to an early account of the tale, Shakespeare had “fallen into ill company; and amongst them, some that made a frequent practice of deer stealing [and] that he robbed a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote.” Some versions of the story named the shame of being discovered in this act as the impetus for Shakespeare leaving his home and start again in the capital. Other accounts also


\(^{61}\) Schoenbaum 346.
accredited the incident with starting the young poet on his writing career. Before fleeing Stratford he was said to have written a “bitter ballad” against Lucy in response to the nobleman’s bringing him before the law.\textsuperscript{62}

This story, not based on any hard evidence, was popular with Stratford locals well into the late nineteenth century when the Shakespeare Memorial Festival opened. For Barry Sullivan’s production of \textit{As You Like It} that was performed during the opening week of the theatre, a stuffed stag—a “descendant of Sir Thomas Lucy’s herd”—was loaned to the acting company by the keepers from Charlecote.\textsuperscript{63} The stuffed stag was placed on stage and hoisted on poles to serve as the centerpiece of the Forest of Arden. The men from Charlecote were also welcomed to take part in the performance; the keepers appeared with their dogs on stage, and one of them was given the line “Lots of people come from all around the country, and even from London to see me and my dogs.” According to Sally Beauman, this “pleased the Stratford audiences mightily.”\textsuperscript{64}

In fact, the stuffed stag so pleased audiences that it continued to be a part of all subsequent productions that Frank Benson mounted of the play. Not until 1919, when Nigel Playfiar was invited by Benson to Stratford to produce a new staging of \textit{As You Like It} was the tradition of the stuffed stag challenged—and then not without fierce resistance. After all, Benson’s production had become an institution in the town. As Beauman describes, “The fact that \textit{[As You Like It]} remained the same year after year,

\begin{footnotes}
\item 62 Shoenbaum 68-72.
\item 63 Kennedy, Dennis. \textit{Looking at Shakespeare}. 121.
\item 64 Beauman, 24.
\end{footnotes}
with familiar sets and costumes, familiar business and familiar performances, created not boredom, but a cozy and complacent pleasure.”\(^{65}\) Benson also relied on, according to Dennis Kennedy, the “nineteenth-century stage traditions and local color” that ensured positive reactions from the audiences. “Though the stag had no necessary connection to the play, its entrance was an expected event, a sign that theatrical orthodoxy ruled, a ritual fulfillment of Stratford’s claim upon Shakespeare.”\(^{66}\)

Playfair’s refusal to include the old stag, which not only did not fit his vision of the play, but was also, by then, decrepit and moth-eaten, was an affront to the local’s sense of ownership of the play and of Shakespeare. Playfair and designer Claud Lovat Fraser departed from the style established by Benson, which had consisted of “heavy canvas flats festooned with painted ivy, which would quiver and shake when Benson, as Orlando, attempted to nail his verses to them.” Benson had, along with placing the stag center-stage, covered the set “ankle-deep with leaves, through which his actors, clad in autumnal russets and greens, tripped and scuffed.” Costumes had been made of a “hotch-potch of velvet, jewels, slashed taffeta, and wrinkled hose.”\(^{67}\) Playfair’s and Lovat’s production, by contrast, was inspired by fifteenth-century illuminated manuscripts, giving the production a consciously stylized and artistic visual quality. *The Times* reviewer liked the changes, but commented on the stark contrast to the past that Playfair’s production embodied:

\(^{65}\) Beauman 33.
\(^{66}\) Kennedy, Dennis. 121.
\(^{67}\) Beauman 65.
“[The play is in a setting] that will be novel to Stratford revenants, but is certainly interesting. . . . The forest . . . is ruthlessly simplified, while the costumes are all 15th century, and very brilliant and exciting . . . even by the dim lighting affected by the modern stage artist. Mr. C. Lovat Fraser, who has designed it all, has, at any rate, vigour, and his daring mixture of styles certainly throws up the player against the scene.”68

Audiences were not as kind as The Times reviewer. The majority reaction in Stratford was decidedly negative. After the performance, as cast, crew, and audiences mingled around Stratford, the usual cordial, small-town atmosphere turned cold; some audience members avoided speaking or making eye contact with anyone who had been involved in the production. Playfair later commented that the response to the production made him feel like a “national criminal.” Claud Lovat Fraser was verbally attacked on the street in Stratford with the warning of do not “meddle with our Shakespeare.”69

The story of As You Like It and the stuffed stag has been recounted by numerous historians. What makes it especially relevant in this chapter on the significance of geography to the work of the Shakespeare Memorial Festival is the way it illustrates competing notions of the link between place and authenticity at work in Stratford in the early twentieth century. Different people in the town held passionately to views of one specific version of the play over another new interpretation. Yet, Shakespeare’s text, of course, provides only an imaginary forest, one which is always re-constituted by the various directors, designers, and actors who

69 Smallwood 2.
work on a given production, as well as by the imaginations of the audience members observing it. Nonetheless, the tangible landscape of Warwickshire provided Stratford audiences at the Memorial Festival a real place that could dictate a particular vision of the forest in which Rosalind and Orlando fall in love. The stuffed stag, a set piece that was once a live animal frolicking in the midlands, related to a beast that supposedly crossed Shakespeare’s path, was no different from the countless artifacts held by the town said to have been connected to the great man. Like his walking stick, chair, or school desk, all preserved for pilgrims, the stuffed stag infused Stratford with a sense of the sacred. The Memorial Theatre, in this case, had a proper relic on stage, “descended from the same herd” that existed during Shakespeare’s youth.

Benson’s two dozen revivals of this local version of *As You Like It* prompts the questions of what was the purpose of staging the plays in historically significant Stratford-upon-Avon and how did the location affect various productions and the reception of them. This second question is more easily discernable from the example of the stuffed stag, especially in the transition from Benson’s use of it to Playfair’s refusal of it: local lore and tradition trumped new readings of the plays. The question of the purpose of the Festival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is more complex. Was the Memorial Festival simply an addition to the pilgrimage aspects of Stratford, or was it also, as Charles Flower had purported, a space to explore more fully what ensemble acting and modern design could illuminated about the Bard’s plays. And why should these two goals necessarily have been at odds with
each other? The answer seems to be that location, in this case, actually required theatre practitioners and audience members to assume a point of view about the notion of authenticity. Did authenticity come from the historical and geographical connections offered by the town, or was it more precisely found in the artistic essence of the plays.

Stratford lost Shakespeare to London the moment he left in the 1580s or 90s. Yet with Sullivan’s and Benson’s productions of *As You Like It*—a play, many felt, was so conspicuously tied to the Warwickshire countryside—the town could claim some responsibility for the Bard’s genius. *As You Like It* provided Stratford with imaginary and tangible ties to Shakespeare. The area had evidently inspired him in his art. The tale of Shakespeare’s deer-poaching incident revealed him to be very much a part of the landscape. Tying this local legend to the first performance of *As You Like It* produced at the first permanent theatre in Stratford openly asserted the return of the town’s most famous son.
‘If [the Shakespeare Memorial Festival] became formal, ceasing to develop and refusing re-birth, surely the waters of the Avon would turn into lead, and Shakespeare’s birthplace mark the burial of his ideals and our own.’

Reginald Buckley wrote these words in 1906; more than fifty years later, the young director Peter Hall expressed similar concerns. After having directed two productions in Stratford in the mid 1950s, he was worried that without radical alterations, the Festival would grow stale and irrelevant. Hall believed that although the Memorial Festival was increasingly successful as a heritage celebration, it held far greater potential as an innovative theatrical institution. He felt that the Festival’s often comfortable and predictable productions failed to compete artistically with the changes afoot in the London theatre world. Hall knew first hand what those changes were; in 1955 in the capital, he had directed the British premiere of Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot. The following year, Hall witnessed the Berliner Ensemble’s first visit to London, whose work demonstrated the innovative potential of Epic theatre production methods. The Ensemble’s groundbreaking productions revealed the artistic

benefits of working as an acting company, of long rehearsal periods, and of a focus on
current or politically contentious issues. Also in 1956, the Royal Court Theatre in
London produced John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*, which critic Kenneth Tynan
celebrated as a definitive break from the tradition of social drama stretching from
A.W. Pinero to Terence Ratigan.\(^2\) Given these developments, Hall concluded that the
commemorative aspects of the Stratford Festival were not merely outdated and
conservative, but damaging to England’s national playwright.

In 1958, Hall was invited by Fordham Flower to become the new artistic
director of the Shakespeare Memorial Festival. He began his tenure in 1959 and in the
following year and a half he succeeded in transforming the Festival into the Royal
Shakespeare Company, an entirely new arts organization, both in terms of its mission
and structure. Hall’s changes altered the relationship that had persisted between the
town and the performance of the Bard’s plays within it. In the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries veneration for Shakespeare’s birthplace colored every aspect of
performance in Stratford. The success of the Memorial Festival was directly related to
the reverential heritage industry in Warwickshire. In the 1950s, this connection had
begun to shift as directors such as Barry Jackson, Anthony Quayle, Glen Byam Shaw,
and Peter Brook focused more on the artistic merit of productions, and less on the
significance of the location in which they were performing. The star actors they
hired—including Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, Peggy Ashcroft, and John

*Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*. Eds. Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton. Cambridge
Gielgud—also altered people’s impressions of the town and its productions. Yet, the “accent was on stars [and] beautiful productions,” which improved the look and quality of performances—with everything looking “glossy”—but did not usually challenge accepted, traditional understandings of the plays. Theatre production had improved over the decades, but in the main the production values and aims were still second to the commemorative aspects of Stratford. Heritage celebration, rather than artistic pursuit, continued to rule in the town.

Not until Peter Hall’s formation of the RSC in 1960 did theatre become equal to, and eventually even more important than, the memorial business of honoring the birthplace. The shift did not occur immediately, though it did develop from many of Hall’s earliest decisions. In his first year as artistic director he altered the financial structure of the company from an entirely self-supporting enterprise to one funded partially by government subsidy. He also implemented three-year contracts for actors with the goal of establishing a coherent performing ensemble. The success of the RSC relied on Hall’s efforts outside of Stratford, as well. He established a second home for the company in London, which as much as any other decision, altered the company’s relationship to its sacred home. With a new performance space in the capital, the RSC

---


4 The formal name change from the Stratford Memorial Festival to the Royal Shakespeare Company occurred a year later, in 1961.
was no longer solely defined by its ties to its pilgrimage location. By loosening the company’s link to Stratford, Hall was able to more successfully mold the RSC into an artistically current, and often politically astute, national institution.

The RSC would prosper and gain wide critical acclaim under Hall and then grow at a tremendous pace under his successors, artistic directors Trevor Nunn and Terry Hands. In the 1990s, under Adrian Noble, the company’s identity in relation to location changed again, with the RSC retreating from London back to Stratford. Finally in the twenty-first century, under artistic director Michael Boyd, the company has embraced its original home in Warwickshire, even embarking on the construction of a new main-stage theatre in Stratford.

In addition to geographic location, architecture has been a crucial spatial determinant for the RSC. As the company grew and initially loosened its ties to Shakespeare’s birthplace, the RSC also acquired new performance spaces in Stratford and London, attempting to break the architectural constraints imposed by 1932 Elizabeth Scott Memorial Theatre. From 1960 to 2006, at various times the company occupied five additional spaces: the Other Place (1974-1989 and 1991-2001) and the Swan (1986-present) in Stratford; and the Aldwych (1960-1982), and the main stage and the Pit in the Barbican (1982-2002) in London. In addition, the company has had annual residencies in Newcastle (since 1977) and short-term stays in experimental spaces in London, such as the Roundhouse. The company has also toured widely in England and abroad.
The Elizabeth Scott Memorial Theatre, renamed the Royal Shakespeare Theatre (RST) in 1961, remains the primary home for the company, though it has continually received alterations and renovations (and from 2007 to 2010 is undergoing a complete transformation), but the additional performance spaces acquired over the years have provided alternative avenues for growth and exploration. The Other Place allowed the company to experiment with intimate performances, which reflected a growing trend in the sixties and seventies in British theatre for smaller, minimalist productions. The Elizabethan-inspired Swan, by contrast, offered the company a thrust stage to explore the Elizabethan and Jacobean essence of performance (though it was never intended to recreate accurate playing conditions). In London, the RSC’s spaces offered the company more varied audiences as well as competition from other theatres. The RSC leased the West End theatre the Aldwych for more than twenty years before transferring, in 1982, to a large purpose-built, “state-of-the-art” space and a studio theatre inside London’s Barbican Centre arts complex. In 2002, the company vacated the Barbican leaving it without a permanent space in the capital.

**Peter Hall: 1959-1968**

Early in his career, Peter Hall established a name for himself in London. In 1955, at only 24 years old, his production of *Waiting for Godot* caught the attention of critics and theatre practitioners and effectively launched the young director’s career. According to Hall, Beckett’s play had been rejected by a number of more established
directors. He took it and later acknowledged how fortunate this circumstance was for him. In 2005, he admitted: “I still wake up wondering what would have become of my life if I had turned it down. It changed everything.” With his early success establishing him as director willing to embrace new works and take chances, Hall found a number of choices ahead. In 1958, for instance, Laurence Olivier offered Hall the assistant directorship of the soon-to-be-formed National Theatre. Instead, the young, iconoclastic director chose to go to the small town of Stratford-upon-Avon.

As a teenager Hall had attended the Shakespeare Memorial Festival, and had seen, among other productions, Peter Brook’s 1946 *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Hall later claimed that the visit had inspired him to become a director and eventually run the Memorial Festival. It is important to note, though, that he was drawn to Stratford because of the directing opportunities and challenges he saw there, not for the sentimental reason that it was Shakespeare’s birthplace. In truth, he disliked the nostalgic aspects of the Shakespeare industry that fueled much of the town’s daily activity.

Once he began his tenure as artistic director, Hall found the notion of the Bard’s sacred space and how it would affect his new company perplexing. Stratford brought with it a multitude of obstacles but, also, advantages. For instance, as birthplace the town offered the RSC the perceived attributes of legitimacy and authenticity. Also, by the 1960s, Stratford was able to supply a substantial audience.

---

for theatre productions. Few people questioned the appropriateness of exploring the
Bard’s works in his native town. On the other hand, the blind veneration for
Shakespeare threatened to cloud the artistic endeavors attempted there. As some of his
predecessors at the Memorial Festival had done, Hall attempted to break down
aesthetic and political boundaries in production while respecting the traditions of
Stratford. He wanted to bring the spirit of change so evident in the capital in the 1950s
and 60s to rural Warwickshire. To make these goals realities, Hall brought a number
of key colleagues to the town. He hired designer John Bury, who created the signature
look of many of the RSC’s foundational productions. Bury had gained experience
from working with Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop in Stratford East and at the
Old Vic. He was highly influenced by Brecht and brought to the RSC stage what has
been described as “selective realism,” which underscored the themes of the play as
determined by the director. Bury did not emulate lavish West End productions (as had
some earlier Stratford designers), nor did he bow to local visions of Shakespeare as
part of the Warwickshire landscape. He and Hall’s interpretations of the plays were
influenced more by European design movements and by their own interest in the
contemporary issues they saw reflected in Shakespeare’s works.

In addition to Bury, Hall invited to Stratford his Cambridge friend John
Barton, who would greatly influence the intellectual and political approaches to the
plays for which the RSC would become famous. Peter Brook was also brought back

---

7 Kennedy 178.
for occasional productions. He had already established a notable presence in Stratford in 1950s, and would continue to shape the new company with his innovative stagings of the plays. Hall’s choices for leading actors were slightly more conservative than for designers and directors. He admired a number of star performers who had already worked in the town and he hoped that bringing them into his new company would ensure ticket sales and provide some sense of continuity from the Memorial Festival tradition. Beyond this, however, he admired many actors as artists. Working with them in new ways might provide a bridge from the past to contemporary ways approaching the plays. Though Hall spoke of creating an ensemble company without stars, he was especially fond of a few already-famous actors, notably Peggy Ashcroft, whom he viewed as leader among equals within the company.

Hall wanted to claim Shakespeare’s plays and prominence in British culture for his newly-formed RSC and, at the same time, distance the company’s work from any nostalgic attachment to the Bard. As Colin Chambers explains, the RSC’s relationship to Stratford was determined by the “double burden of privilege and responsibility [of] inheriting custody of the shrine” of Shakespeare’s birthplace. Hall was more discriminating than previous Memorial Festival directors had been in shaping his company’s relationship to Shakespeare’s legacy. He was determined that the commemorative industry of Stratford would not interfere with the artistic mission of the RSC. In this sense, Hall heeded advice that Peter Brook would later give in his

---

famous book *The Empty Space*: that “we mustn’t allow ourselves to become dupes of nostalgia.”\(^9\) Perhaps the most significant philosophical approach that Hall implemented in combating the commemorative aspects of Stratford was to treat Shakespeare as though he were a modern playwright. In 1965, this notion was formally articulated in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* by the Polish theatre critic Jan Kott. Hall had seen an early proof of one of Kott’s essays and encouraged actors in the company to read his work as well.\(^10\) The RSC wanted to explore Shakespeare’s writings for the present—for the “second Elizabethan age.”

In establishing the RSC, Hall claimed that his primary goal was to “develop a company with a strong permanent nucleus.” He insisted that a core acting company would alleviate a number of difficulties that the Festival had faced in the past. Hall argued that previous directors in Stratford had struggled precisely because they had not had the luxury of working with an ensemble of actors:

Between 1948 and 1959, Stratford pursued the policy of a rich and exciting anthology theatre under three immensely successful directors, Sir Barry Jackson, Anthony Quayle, and Glen Byam Shaw. But there could be no long term plan of development because there was a new company each year. I think it was the burden of continually restarting which finally disillusioned each of these remarkable men.\(^11\)

---


Hall had been influenced by not only the Berliner Ensemble which toured to London in 1956, but also by the Moscow Art Theatre, which visited in 1958. He drew upon and attempted to merge certain production styles of both, but he most admired the fact that both were ensemble companies. He wanted to create a similar group for England, one that would benefit from extended rehearsal periods and establishing coherent, long-standing working relationships. In this sense, Stratford served Hall’s ambitions by providing a secluded environment in which a group of actors could focus entirely on their work. Yet, getting performers to commit to long residencies in Warwickshire proved difficult initially. When Hall asked the celebrated actor Paul Scofield to take part in the first season of the RSC, for example, Scofield, who had performed in Stratford in the 1940s, at first agreed. However, shortly before his contract was to begin, he sent a letter stating that he simply “could not face coming to Stratford.” He—like many of his contemporaries and future RSC actors—was concerned about missing potential opportunities in London as well as finding fulfillment in the village life of Stratford.

Hall knew that certain issues—including not only the geographic location of Stratford and its birthplace environment, but also the spatial configuration of the theatre—would have to be addressed if he were to achieve his goals. He tried to transform people’s opinions about Stratford. He promoted the “campus feel” of the town as a positive attribute for the company. His reworking of Stratford as a desirable

---

12 Chambers 16.
13 Scofield later returned to Stratford. In 1967 he won critical acclaim for his portrayal of Macbeth in what was Peter Hall’s final Stratford production as artistic director of the RSC.
location cast the town as the only place in Britain where an actor would have the opportunity and advantage of a three-year contract, dedicated to the study and performance of Shakespeare.\(^{14}\) (The system of three-year contracts did not last long; actors resisted committing themselves to one enterprise for so long. The arrangement was altered to include varying lengths of contracts.)

Hall also wanted to provide his company a suitable theatre. In 1961, besides renaming the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Hall extended the stage fourteen feet to create more of a thrust configuration, and he added a rake to it in hopes of improving audience sight lines.\(^{15}\) This latter addition proved significant for the RSC. Audiences could see the floor and therefore designers often “used it to establish the basic emotional coloration for production.” The rake was “given varied treatments, from metal to bare planks to painted designs.” Designer John Bury noted that, for him, the raked floor at Stratford was the single most important design element.\(^{16}\) The RSC’s decision to use the rake so wittingly could be seen as the company’s attempted reclamation of the land—symbolically, that is, through the manipulation of the stage floor. Focusing the audience’s attention on the rake was part of Hall’s alteration of the hallowed space of Stratford. As for the rest of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, little could be done about the overall shape of the

\(^{14}\) Smallwood 104.
\(^{16}\) Kennedy 180.
auditorium; Hall had no choice but to accept the cinema-like seating of the theatre. Nonetheless, the new stage would allow, in theory, for actors to bridge what had been a sizeable gap between the front row and the playing space.

Despite the many changes Hall implemented during his first years as artistic director, he still felt the pressure of Stratford’s history. He tried to define the company largely in opposition to the personality of its location, but as Colin Chambers notes, “to reassess iconic Shakespeare dynamically meant challenging the very inheritance that gave the company its claim to legitimacy.” The RSC descended from the long tradition of commemorative performance in Stratford, which tended to promote “pretty” and respectful readings of Shakespeare’s texts. In production, Hall repeatedly broke from this tradition, all the while maintaining certain, underlying aspects of it. In his 1960 production of *Troilus and Cressida*, for instance, he and designer Leslie Hurry placed a sandpit on stage (again focusing on the stage floor) and highlighted the anti-realism of the play. Yet, Hall remained true to the basic tradition that each play needed a newly designed and impressive set. As Andrew Gurr notes, “The RSC still believed that unless you invented a whole new set for every play you [were] not seen to be using your money wisely.”

Hall found that the “baggage of bardolatry was carried by actors, audiences, academics and critics alike.” While these various groups “demanded Shakespeare be produced ‘properly,’” they also were “prepared to police productions deemed to fall

---

17 Gurr, Andrew. Interview. 21 August 2006.
beyond the pale.” Fortunately, Hall was adept at walking the line between tradition and innovation. He admitted as much: “I am regarded . . . as a dangerous revolutionary by what’s called the theatrical establishment, and as a new conservative by the revolutionaries.” Many of his productions challenged traditional stage conventions, particularly his 1963 critical masterpiece with John Barton, *The Wars of the Roses*, which will be discussed later in more detail. Yet, at the same time, Hall enjoyed and exploited the star system (contrary to some of his rhetoric about acting ensemble), often relying on big names to open a season or seeking out potential new stars. Peter O’Toole was one such fresh face, though he quickly left Stratford to pursue his film career. Hall also continued the Birthday play tradition, celebrating the Bard’s supposed birthday with the performance of a play.

One area in which Hall did especially embrace tradition was in his attention to language and textual scrutiny. Here, however, tradition referred only partly to the ways in which previous Memorial Festival directors had approached Shakespeare’s plays. Tradition in this case meant more what Hall believed was the purest way to understand the authentic meaning of the plays. Memorial Festival directors had long supported attention to verse-speaking. William Bridges-Adams, for example, had a reputation among his actors for knowing “his author backwards.” Bridges-Adams, Ben Iden Payne, and Barry Jackson were all highly influenced by William Poel’s emphasis on a reexamination of largely un-cut versions of the texts and on swift, clear

---

18 Chambers 116.
19 “Mr. Peter Hall’s Plain Speaking About the Theatre.” *The Times*. 18 January 1962.
20 Beauman 74.
delivery of the lines. In addition to textual scrutiny, many Memorial Festival directors had encouraged, and sometimes required, actors to take voice classes. The attention to language and delivery, however, never came close to the focus that was applied under Peter Hall’s regime.

In its early years under Hall, the RSC gained a reputation for speaking Shakespeare’s verse “correctly.” Hall had long been interested in methods for understanding and acting blank verse, yet unlike many twentieth century directors who began their careers as actors and developed their opinions about verse from their own experiences in front of audiences, Hall’s approach derived from academia. Educated at Cambridge, Hall had been influenced by scholars such as F. R. Leavis and George Rylands. Leavis promoted the practice of textual scrutiny; he was not interested in performance, but he was unrelenting in his passion for the recovery of meaning in the text as well as in his belief that art had the potential to instruct society. Rylands, on the other hand, delighted in theatrical production. His teachings on Shakespeare’s plays analyzed the poetic structure and performance potential of the plays. Hall openly acknowledged both men’s contribution to his approach, especially Leavis: “The greatest influence on me, on my generation, was Leavis, who believed above everything in a critical examination of the text, the search for meaning and metaphor . . . [and] scrutinizing the text for its real meaning.”

The goal for Hall was to decipher the “clues” in the language to get closer to what he believed Shakespeare intended, both in terms of the themes and philosophies of the plays and in terms of performance. As director, Hall would be primarily concerned with themes and conceptual aspects of the plays. Decipher clues for acting purposes—both in terms of portraying character motivation and fluidly speaking the lines—would be more the performer’s job. To help actors better utilize the text, Hall insisted that they attend verse-speaking and voice workshops. In 1959, Hall invited his Cambridge friend John Barton, who also supported these ideas, to serve as a co-director for the soon-to-be-formed RSC. Together the two men developed their particular understanding of blank verse for actors, which included guidelines for phrasing, appropriate places to breathe, and even explorations of how the Elizabethan dialect might have sounded. They emphasized that Shakespeare’s texts were full of “hidden hints to the actor,” and that when and actor learned to discover these clues, he would find “that Shakespeare himself starts to direct him.”

Hall’s emphasis on “correct” verse speaking was a response to what he found when he first worked in Stratford as a guest director in 1956:

Actors did not understand what a blank-verse line was. They were either taught that if you got the sense right, the verse would take care of itself. Or they were taught that if you elongate the vowels to make it musical, the verse would support itself. It doesn’t. The worst excess of the nineteenth century was exclamation.

---

23 Fay 111.
Unlike Hall’s approach to staging, in which he avoided utilizing Elizabethan costuming and scenery, Hall’s attitude toward verse speaking relied on knowledge and application of the past. He and Barton frequently referenced what they understood of the Elizabethan worldview to demonstrate the meaning or structure of the language. John Barton insisted that the best advice on speaking Shakespeare came from the playwright himself, in Hamlet’s advice to the players:

> Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it as many of our players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. . . . Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature.

Hall also asked actress Edith Evans, who had worked with William Poel, to demonstrate what she had learned from the Elizabethanist. Evans claimed that Poel’s methods were derived from a tradition passed down since the seventeenth century—beginning with actor Thomas Betterton.²⁴

The RSC’s emphasis on “accuracy” in language stemmed in part from Hall’s belief that “now only the texts of Shakespeare’s plays remain” and that “all we can do, by diligent scholarship and hard work, is to try to express Shakespeare’s intentions in terms that modern audiences can understand.”²⁵ He and Barton both insisted that they were not “offering [themselves] as high priests but as explorers or detectives.”²⁶ Nonetheless, the RSC methods, published in books and a video series, *Playing Shakespeare*, influenced an entire generation of drama students. The themes, poetic

---

²⁴ Chambers 142.
²⁶ Barton 7
structure, and performance potential of the plays were what mattered to Hall; the Shakespearean relics—the waters of the Avon, or the birthplace on Henley Street—only served to distract from the texts. In fact, in production the RSC considered sentimentalism for the Elizabethan world or “accuracy” in costume and other design elements “restrictive and reductive.”

These attitudes partially explain the RSC’s reaction to the proposed plans for a Globe replica, which Sam Wanamaker announced to the London theatre world in 1964. Many RSC directors and actors, as Colin Chambers points out, responded that such a feat was a “logical impossibility,” and, moreover, ineffective because “society had outgrown the original theatres.”27 With the important exception of verse-speaking, the RSC was thoroughly reluctant “to cede authority to the past rather than secure legitimacy through the present.” 28

Fundamental to gaining legitimacy in Hall’s eyes—in terms of national status—was his plan to secure a London home for the company. Unlike previous Stratford directors such as Frank Benson, who had desired to work in the capital largely for increased recognition, status, and for the romantic ideal of holding the mantle as the next great actor-manager, Hall’s aims were motivated more by his ambitions for his company. At some level, Hall sought recognition and status as well,

---

27 Hall did not reject the notion that the Globe space would be valuable to understanding the plays; he simply resisted the attempt to rebuild it. In May 1975, Hall wrote about his experience visiting the Greek theatre at Epidaurus: “My first introduction to the great theatre at Epidaurus. I was overwhelmed by it. The whole day was unforgettable. It’s exactly as if someone said to me, ‘the Globe has after all been preserved on the South Bank, come over and have a look at it, then you might understand something about staging Shakespeare.’” (Peter Hall’s Diaries)  
28 Chambers 119-20
but more importantly he knew that in order to establish his company as a formidable, national arts institution he would need to extend its reach beyond Stratford. Geography mattered to Hall’s vision of a premiere, national theater ensemble performing new plays and exploring more of the classical repertory. Moreover, productions would have longer runs if they transferred to the capital and actors would experience a wider range of audiences by being there. Hall was also motivated by competition: the proposed National Theatre would likely entice the best designers and actors in the country, making it even more difficult for Stratford to recruit staff and artistic talent than it already was.29

One of the greatest challenges that he and previous Stratford artistic directors had faced was the town’s dependency on London opinions. Since the opening of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1879, Londoners had expressed their thoughts about the Festival’s achievements. Even when on occasion critics had given favorable assessments of Stratford productions, they were asserting their authority as the primary arbiters of taste. The Memorial Festival’s reputation—its legitimacy derived from London reviewers—was bolstered by positive remarks throughout the 1950s, but this recognition was not enough for Hall. The Festival’s work was often hailed as good, but the question remained: good for the standards of Stratford, or good for those of the capital. Hall’s response to the London critics’ monopoly on artistic discrimination was to join them. Bringing his Stratford-based company to London

29 Fay 98.
effectively forced the lingering issue of geographic discrimination into the open. On one level, he also seemed to be solving the problems associated with location by erasing the RSC’s tie to a single, sacred home. The outcome was not so simple, though, and instead precipitated additional problems and conflicts.

Hall leased the London theatre the Aldwych in 1960, a proscenium space in the West End Theatre district, which he intended to use primarily for new plays by contemporary playwrights. He hoped that the new location would increase the RSC’s favorable reputation, as well make the company a viable and more visible national organization. He was, in some ways, refashioning Stratford as an extension of the London theatre world. His choice of location within the capital spoke to his ambitions; he wanted a high profile and accessible destination. The Aldwych in the West End allowed the RSC to align itself with established theatres. Other companies that Hall admired, including Theatre Workshop, the Old Vic, and Théâtre National Populaire in Paris were located in working class neighborhoods, and Hall’s own political leanings, as a “self declared radical and Labour supporter”30 might have prompted him to follow their examples. Yet Hall needed to find a venue that would counter many of the geographic problems, such as marginalization, that the RSC had faced in Stratford. Clearly, the West End Theatre District would serve his purpose.31 Actors would hone their craft and rehearse the plays in Warwickshire, away from the bustle of the city.

31 Chambers “Home Sweet Home” 91.
They would benefit from the peaceful atmosphere of Stratford, and then they would 
also perform in the capital’s theatre district to demonstrate what they had achieved. To 
solidify the link between Stratford and London, the stage of the Aldwych was 
modified to the specifications of the stage of the RST.32

Arguments in favor of a London base had been building since the late forties, 
when Barry Jackson successfully toured in the capital. In the 1950s, Anthony Quayle 
articulated the need for such a shift if the Memorial Theatre were to have a successful 
artistic future. He asserted that “the Governors [of the Festival] must realize that you 
cannot run a great theatre from the middle of Warwickshire.” Quayle insisted that he 
“had to have some sort of base in London.” Although the cosmopolitan biases against 
provincial Stratford had abated in the mid-twentieth century, Quayle still worried that 
the Memorial Festival actors and directors were “stuck in Warwickshire like rabbits, 
growing fur all over [them].”33

As Hall lobbied the RSC board for a London base, he also pushed the 
government for the RSC to become a national institution. Here Stratford worked to his 
advantage. In arguing for the London home, he had claimed that without a base in the 
capital, the Festival could never move beyond its heritage status. This argument cast 
Stratford as an out-of-the-way and insufficient location. However, the role Stratford 
played in gaining national prominence for the RSC was manifold. Once the company 
established a London home, Stratford would serve to maintain the RSC’s connection

32 Hall 45.
to the rest of England, outside of the capital. Stratford’s appeal here was sentimental and practical: the town had produced England’s greatest dramatist, which warranted commemoration, and, geographically, it was located in the midlands—in the “heartland” of England. To the Festival’s Governors, Hall claimed that the small town was not enough; to the English government he insisted that Stratford deserved special consideration because it was Shakespeare’s birthplace and also quintessentially British.

A number of the Governors in Stratford were overwhelmed by Hall’s numerous plans. They interpreted his proposal for a London home as “an urban snub to rural Stratford’s festival role as guardian of Shakespeare’s spirit,” which in part it was. Hall had never been interested in guarding Shakespeare’s spirit—at least not the version of it that had been defined by the heritage industry of the poet’s hometown. Hall’s efforts also angered other potential funding recipients. Some regional theatres were upset that the RSC, a Stratford-based company, had received such substantial arts funding. In the distribution of national grants more was given to Stratford than to any other regional city or town. Yet the only unique aspect about the town was its connection to Shakespeare. Evidently, this defining feature allowed Stratford certain privileges.

---

34 Chambers, Inside the RSC 10, 29.
Peter Hall’s tenure in Stratford was marked by rapid and radical changes. His vision for the RSC, which was undoubtedly influenced by the larger artistic trends developing out of post-war Europe and Britain—seen in companies such as the Berliner Ensemble and Theatre Workshop—was also greatly affected by the geographic and spatial forces at work in Stratford. Hall structured his company not solely in emulation of other artistically and politically astute acting ensembles, but in response to the specific geographic and heritage aspects of Stratford. Though various paths were open to him in the late 1950s, Hall chose Stratford as the home for his ensemble company. The acting company was the first priority for Hall and he, therefore, appreciated what the town could offer. As Colin Chambers notes, “in building a shared aim [amongst the ensemble], Stratford was critical. For all of London’s strategic importance, the crucible of the company remained Stratford, and Hall had been determined to make Stratford the place to be.” Hall’s efforts were always focused on taking the benefits offered by Stratford—such as historical legitimacy (which to Hall was different from blind veneration), and more importantly freedom to experiment away from the capital—and manipulating them to serve artistic means as well as to establish national and international recognition for the RSC’s work.

35 Chambers 52.
Trevor Nunn: 1968-1986

In 1968, Hall ended his tenure with the RSC and the company came under the artistic directorship of Trevor Nunn. Cambridge-educated like his predecessor, Nunn expanded upon many of Hall’s aspirations for the company. Nunn stayed with the RSC until 1986, though in 1978 he invited Terry Hands to serve as co-artistic director. During his almost twenty-year engagement with the company, the organization would develop into the “largest and most active [theatre] company in the world.”36 Already in its first decade, under Hall, the RSC had “trebled its audience to over a million a year, quadrupled its annual income, and won over 50 national and international awards.”37 For Nunn to accelerate the company’s growth and acclaim from such a pace was remarkable, especially given that his initial appointment as the next RSC artistic director had been met with trepidation by many in the theatre world. Nunn was young, completely inexperienced at running a large institution, and when compared to Hall, he did not particularly exude charisma or confidence.

Nonetheless, early in his tenure Nunn proved himself capable of the task of running the RSC. One of his first gestures as artistic director was to clean up, literally, the main rehearsal room in Stratford, bringing in a new stage-cloth for the floor. This symbolic act was followed with new rules for actors to follow: no smoking and coffee drinking in the room, and an “emphasis . . . on self-improvement: the actors were to come in for . . . singing classes, movement classes, voice classes, and sonnet

36 Kennedy 238
In terms of performance of the plays, Stratford was no longer a shrine for the veneration of the man William Shakespeare; under Nunn, the town was firmly established as a shrine for the veneration of artistic excellence. This transformation had begun under Hall, but Nunn solidified it. The RSC had survived its first transition of power; under Nunn, Stratford’s heritage industry would not encroach on the RSC. Nunn’s strict rules relaxed relatively quickly into his tenure, but the underlying spirit of hard work and discipline remained. Stratford in the 1970s and early 80s was a place for training, rehearsing, and exploring the art of performance—what many considered the true legacy of Shakespeare.

Although Nunn inherited a company that had reached an almost unprecedented measure of success for such a short period of time, the RSC, in 1968, also came with many problems. Financially the company was suffering. In addition, its rapid growth in terms of personnel had threatened to undermine the original mission envisioned by Hall—of a tight, artistically coherent acting ensemble. Nunn attempted to reassert Hall’s foundational goals, but, notably, Nunn actually expanded the size of the company considerably during his long regime. The effect of this growth did not cause a disintegration of the company, but it did alter the institution, effectively creating smaller factions within it.

---

38 Beauman 298.
Growth for the RSC meant radical changes in regard to geography and space and, under Nunn, issues to do with location and architecture became increasingly charged and complicated. The expanding size of the company, fracturing its singular identity, is illustrated in various developments in architecture in Stratford and London in the seventies and eighties.

In Stratford in 1974, the company opened a second theatre, a studio space named the Other Place. The small space could be configured in any number of ways, including arena, thrust, and proscenium arrangements. The new theatre was developed by Mary Ann ‘Buzz’ Goodbody who, at the time, was the only female director at the RSC. Goodbody and Nunn agreed on the benefits of a studio space:

In a small theatre, speech becomes as intimate as the environment and actors are encouraged to speak with vocal qualities close to those of everyday life. Sighs, whispers, subtleties of pitch, pace, tone and inflection can be genuinely produced and expressed; whereas on a large stage these can appear contrived, over-explosive and/or overemphatic.39

The dynamic between performer and audience associated with the Other Place made it a popular venue for the RSC for fifteen years. (In 1989 the theatre was demolished due to fire and safety regulations. A new, cleaned-up version of the original was erected in its place and served the company until 2001.)

Despite its success, the Other Place suffered a tremendous set-back in its first year when Goodbody took her own life in 1975. Nunn, Barton, and a number of other directors continued to work there with her goals in mind. The Other Place was as

different in architectural style from the RST as could be imagined. Essentially a “small corrugated-iron hut,” the theatre had first been used as a rehearsal and studio space in the 1960s. Although it was an unlikely structure for a National Institution such as the RSC, the Other Place represented a trend developing in seventies of directors and actors favoring small theatres. In part, they had been influenced by Peter Brook’s 1968 manifesto *The Empty Space*, which called for a re-energizing of British theatre. Many practitioners and audience members found that a “no-frills shack” such as the Other Place provided a more conducive atmosphere for exciting theatre than the traditional proscenium stages such as the “Odeon-like Memorial Theatre.”

Director Katie Mitchell recalled the small theatre’s appeal:

> The Other Place was like a room, it wasn’t a theatre. People had to rummage around and bring things in to make it a theatre, I don’t mean that in a negative way, I mean that very positively, so it already had an atmosphere of an empty space . . . As soon as you walked in there it became about the theatre space and making plays.

Stratford as a significant location had presented the RSC with the challenge of upholding the traditional and national voice of Shakespeare and with gaining critical acclaim—two goals sometimes at odds with each other. Part of Nunn’s solution to this dilemma was to expand into multiple architectural spaces. The company’s identity as shaped by Stratford was diffused by this expansion. The Other Place served as an “empty space” for the RSC’s more experimental projects. The space allowed for new

---

40 Beauman 320.
42 Smith-Howard 137.
ways of working and bore no marks of veneration for the Bard. The RST, on the other hand, spoke to the grandeur of the RSC as a National institution. It was a massive and modern proscenium theatre for more “traditional” audiences.

Then, in 1986, Nunn and Terry Hands opened a third Stratford theatre, the Swan. The new space surprised critics and practitioners alike. Described by Dennis Kennedy as “the most significant architectural advance the company . . . ever made,” the Swan pulled together multiple aspects of the RSC’s history and future ambitions. Since the company’s inception under Hall, it had sought to distance itself from obtrusive Elizabethanism and nostalgic Victorianism—the two presiding, early twentieth-century forces in the legacy of Shakespeare performance. Yet Nunn and Hands knew that the RSC could benefit financially as well as artistically from both traditions. The company simply had to draw from them in sophisticated ways. In the seventies, Nunn had begun to consider the advantages of a third performance space in Stratford. Among other things, the new space would allow the company to explore the works of Shakespeare’s contemporaries, a goal the RSC had long held. The obvious site for the new theatre was the space inside the shell of the 1879 Memorial Theatre, which at the time was being used as a rehearsal room. What remained of the Victorian building after the 1926 fire were its curved outer walls, which inspired architects Michael Reardon and Tim Furby to design a theatre that combined elements of the circular and horseshoe-shaped Elizabethan playhouses, Jacobean banqueting rooms,

---

43 Kennedy 335.
and early restoration theatres. Reardon and Furby never wished to reconstruct
“Shakespeare’s theatre”; instead they took the basic Elizabethan and Jacobean
influences and altered them for the needs of modern production by the RSC. The
resulting structure honored the Victorian heritage of the company’s predecessor by
utilizing the original Shakespeare Memorial Theatre; at the same time, the space
would allow the company to experiment with the Elizabethan-style theatres that had
first housed Shakespeare’s plays. The exterior of the building was further enhanced by
a new roof “to add a soaring, festive air to the skyline of the theatre that, according to
Reardon, suggest[ed] a circus tent or jousting pavilion.”44 The building was playful
and charming, but still new and innovative. The name of the new theatre, the Swan,
alludes to the original Elizabethan playhouse, famous today largely due to Johannes
DeWitt’s 1596 sketch. The name also references Stratford; the swan had long been a
symbol for the small town and for the River Avon, and had served as the centerpiece
for the RSC’s first logo in the 1960s.

The exterior and interior design of the Swan Theatre blends into its
environment in Stratford more than the other RSC venues within the town. The theatre
allows audiences to “effortlessly cross from picturesque Stratford to a warm theatrical
sanctuary.”45 By comparison, the massive art deco RST has from the building’s

44 Adler 35.
45 Chambers, Inside the RSC 89.
opening seemed out of place on the banks of the Avon; the structure dwarfs the small
Tudor-style cottages still prevalent in Warwickshire. Likewise, the Other Place’s stark
utilitarian form contrasted with the majority of quaint buildings in Stratford.

The Swan seats approximately 450 spectators in an intimate horseshoe shape
auditorium consisting of three stacked levels. The long rectangular thrust stage
guarantees that no audience member will be seated more than thirty feet from the
action. Constructed from “honey-colored Douglas fir wood, light red brick walls,
[and] mauve-brown seats,”⁴⁶ the theatre is acknowledged by many play-goers and
critics as one the most delightful and inviting performances spaces created in the
twentieth century. Robert Smallwood called it “perhaps the most successful space for
recent Shakespeare productions;”⁴⁷ Marion O’Connor describes the Swan as a place of
“astonishing beauty . . . and energy;”⁴⁸ and recent RSC artistic director Adrian Noble
claimed that “the space reveals plays at their best, and plays sound good in it.”⁴⁹
Perhaps the most conspicuous praise for the theatre comes from imitation: the Chicago
Shakespeare Theater Company modeled their theatre on Navy Pier, which opened in
1999, after the Swan.

⁴⁶ Adler 36.
⁴⁷ Smallwood 113.
⁴⁸ O’Connor, Marion. “Reconstructive Shakespeare: Reproducing Elizabethan and Jacobean Stages.”
_Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage_. Eds. Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton. Cambridge
⁴⁹ Adler 39.
As appealing as the space is, the theatre has posed a few challenges for directors and designers. Many practitioners appreciate the strong connection that the Swan provides between actors and audiences, but often they discover that the space is difficult to manipulate scenically. Designers find that the beautiful, light wood and ambience of the Swan “imposes itself, hugely,” as scenographer Bob Crowley described. He added: “no matter what you do you design against it at your peril.”

Director Michael Boyd experienced a variation of this issue when staging *Henry VI, parts 1, 2, and 3*. The “feel good” nature of the theatre diffused the emotional tone he wanted to create with his productions. To solve the problem he darkened the color of the auditorium.

Overwhelmingly, though, the Swan has been a successful venue for the RSC. Critic James Fenton describes its affect on Shakespeare’s texts as an immediate feeling of “ah yes, that solves the problem,” whatever it might be “without having any pretensions to archaeological accuracy.” He, like so many others, sees the Swan as “the kind of structure the company’s core repertoire belongs in.”

Yet when the theatre was first proposed in the late seventies, the RSC did not have enough money to fund the project. In the 1980s, an American philanthropist and oil millionaire, Frederick Koch, donated the roughly two million pounds needed to construct the

---

50 Kennedy 336.
51 Chambers, *Inside the RSC* 91.
52 Fenton
Swan. It was not the first time that Stratford had been helped financially by Americans. The rebuilding of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in the early thirties had been heavily subsidized by donors from across the Atlantic.

The expansion into multiple theatres in Stratford, over a period of nearly twenty years, reveals the changing relationship between the RSC and Stratford. Growth, during Nunn’s tenure, allowed the company to play with various aspects of the town’s personality. The reverential and commemorative aspects of the town could be used to advantage with the RST, which maintained the sophisticated countenance of the company. Actors in the seventies even dubbed the core company of the RST the “heavy brigade,” referring to the “experience and prestige of the leading actors” who tended to perform regularly in the space. In 1984, Stanley Wells, describing Antony Sher as Richard III at RST, noted the lavishness and excellence of the production: “We might almost be at Covent Garden in the era of John Philip Kemble.” By the 1980s, many reviewers considered the RST to be among its generation’s finest venues—not, as previously noted, as a performance space, but certainly in terms of the productions being mounted there. This elevated, decorous stature was contrasted by The Other Place. The small performance space seemed to flout any indication of Stratford as place of veneration. Its name insinuated that it was a secondary and even geographically ambiguous domain. The theatre was an experimental space, a slice of London avant garde shifted to Warwickshire. The Swan, by comparison, allowed the

---

53 Beauman 300.
RSC to cleverly acknowledge the heritage industry of Stratford, while refusing to take part in it fully. The Elizabethan-inspired space married Charles Flower’s gothic commemorative structure with a Shakespearean essence, all the while maintaining its connection to the present.

Trevor Nunn’s expansion of the company in Stratford was only part of his reassessment of geographic and spatial issues facing the RSC. As it had been for the company under Hall, London played an important role in its development. By the late 1960s the Aldwych, which Hall had begun leasing at the beginning of his tenure, was not playing to capacity. The RSC, though critically successful, had been losing London theatre-goers to the recently formed National Theatre (established in 1963), temporarily occupying the Old Vic. Nonetheless, the RSC, like the National, had plans for expansion in the capital. In 1964, the RSC had announced its intention to occupy the main theatre inside the soon-to-be-constructed Barbican Centre, an “enormous urban arts and housing complex to be built within the City of London.” The RSC would hold two spaces within the Barbican: the large, principle theatre and a small studio space called the Pit. The London Symphony Orchestra also would take up residence in the Barbican, becoming the RSC’s neighbor.

From the 1964 announcement, it would take eighteen years before the Barbican finally opened, and in that time the RSC continued its lease at the Aldwych.

---

55 The National Theatre complex on the South Bank, which includes three theatres (the Olivier, the Lyttelton, and the Cottesloe), would open in 1976.
In the late sixties, Nunn shifted the primary purpose of the RSC’s London base from being a space dedicated almost exclusively to contemporary works (as Hall had intended), to being a place for a variety of productions including revivals of classic British plays, transfers of Shakespeare productions from Stratford, and new works. In 1981, a year before the company was to move into the Barbican, Gareth Lloyd Evans commented that there was a sense that the “country’s metropolitan heart depend[ed] mightily on the arterial flow” from Stratford. Nunn’s policy of increasing the number of transfers alongside developing contemporary works improved attendance for the RSC in London, and the company hoped for an even brighter future with the Barbican Centre.

During the seventies and early eighties expectations for the new theatre ballooned. Peter Hall, then serving as artistic director of the National Theatre, lent advice—as did other past and current RSC authorities including Peter Brook, Michel Saint-Denis, and designer John Bury—for the design of the new RSC theatre inside the Barbican. Despite its size of over a thousand seats, the new theatre was created to maintain an intimate quality. Its “two upper tiers were cantilevered inwards,” Beauman describes, “so that those highest from the stage were as close to it as those in the stalls.” In hopes of improving sight line problems that had plagued the RSC in Stratford, the new theatre would have a wide auditorium. The plans also included a “flexible proscenium, computer-controlled fly system, cavernous backstage areas, and

---

58 Chambers, Inside the RSC 78.
59 Beauman 346.
The new Barbican theatre was impressively technologically sophisticated and would allow the RSC to explore the latest in stage design artistry.

Once the RSC moved into the space in 1982, however, the Barbican’s failings quickly became apparent. The main theatre inside the complex, which was meant to end all speculation about the RSC’s presence in London, instead created myriad problems for the company and its core identity. Although touted as intimate and modern (much like 1932 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre), the new theatre proved to be impersonal and plagued with architectural problems. On occasion, RSC performances were cancelled due to technical malfunctions. In addition, the stage space made transfers from Stratford difficult. Despite efforts to accommodate them, the Barbican Theatre’s wide stage and high-tech design only complicated matters. The Pit, the small studio theatre for the RSC, was situated underneath the main stage in the Barbican complex. Audiences repeatedly complained that the black box space was not easily accessible. The RSC also struggled with soundproofing the Pit.

While the company created many successful productions in the main Barbican theatre and the Pit, critics sometimes commented that the RSC did so in spite of the architectural shortcomings of their spaces (echoing remarks about the main stage in Stratford). The larger Barbican complex exacerbated the two theatres’ problems, partially due to its unusually “charged” atmosphere, as noted by a critic from *The

---

60 Adler 70.
Guardian: “It had an electrifying impact on London audiences. So much so that every
time anyone touched one of its metal handrails in those early days, they recoiled with
the kind of short, sharp shock.” He went on to note additional shortcomings of the
building:

The Centre’s insoluble problem is that it has no real entrance and no outward
profile. One is only aware of it when one is inside it, making it like a middle-
class underground station. Its extensive foyers lack landmarks and any sense of
focus. There is something unsatisfying about a building whose most prominent
feature is its cloakroom.61

Peter Hall admitted his disappointment by calling the Centre an “inhuman
environment like a second-rate airport.”62 The majority of the public also disliked the
building; in 2003 (one year after the RSC had ended its lease with the Centre), a BBC
survey asked Londoners to vote on the capital’s ugliest building. The Barbican took
first place.

Critics and audiences also voiced concern about the building’s location, a
factor about which the RSC had been apprehensive early in its decision to move there.
Their first London home, the Aldwych, was part of the West End Theatre District near
Covent Garden, a popular tourist destination. By comparison, the Barbican was
located in the City, a distinct section of the larger metropolis of London. Theatre-goers
would have a more difficult time reaching the Barbican and once there, the area would
offer little in terms of restaurants and other night life. The City had for centuries been
the business center of the capital, but it had not typically housed entertainment or arts.

62 Chambers, Inside the RSC 78 (Peter Hall Making an Exhibition of Myself, 1993).
One notable exception, almost four-hundred years earlier, had been the Blackfriars theatre, where Shakespeare’s company performed in the early seventeenth century, and which was located on the Southern edge of the City. The new Barbican Centre was not situated near the site of the historic Blackfriars and therefore had no direct relation—sentimental or otherwise—to it. Issues to do with sacred space did not affect the RSC’s decision to move into the Barbican complex. Nor did the RSC attempt to recreate a stage space similar to that of the Blackfriars; this aspect of the company’s identity—proximity to historically significant sites—so present for the RSC in Stratford was completely avoided or ignored in the City. Such an opportunity for recovering Shakespeare’s stage space and performance conditions had no appeal apparently to anyone at the RSC. More relevant to the company’s move was the existing identity of the City, which had developed from centuries of sanctioned activity such as banking and commercial enterprise, and had later been influenced by the twentieth-century hardships of the war. Theatrical activity had not been especially important in shaping the neighborhood. If anything, the location had gained a reputation for being inhospitable to entertainment and arts; sixteenth-century attitudes

63 Because of Blackfriars location, near a number of vocal and influential private neighbors, the members of the King’s Men had faced resistance when they first tried to move into the theatre, though eventually in 1609, they were permitted to perform there. The theatre was destroyed in 1655 and today this sacred site is known as Playhouse Yard. A plaque now marks the significance of the location, but despite its strong historical ties to Shakespeare (the neighborhood also claims the site of one of Shakespeare’s residences within London) the Blackfriars location does not attract tourists in any great number.

64 The Barbican was first conceived of in the 1950s as part of a plan to revitalize the City’s image, particularly in the wake of the severe bombing that had occurred in the area during World War II.
against performance had, after all, influenced Elizabethan businessmen and actors to build on the Southbank of the Thames, outside of the City. Blackfriars had been an exception.

Though no sacred relationship existed between Blackfriars and the Barbican, one parallel is notable. For both the King’s Men and the RSC, being located inside the City meant standing apart—literally and figuratively—from other theatre companies. The RSC, which had been defined by its relationship to Shakespeare’s birthplace of Stratford, now sought a new home not simply in the capital, but within the boundaries of perhaps the most sanctioned neighborhood of London. The location signaled that the RSC was undoubtedly a leading national institution tied to the heart of London’s business district and working alongside other top arts organizations such as the London Symphony. The move altered, even fractured, the identity of the company. As the center of business within London, remote for many theatre-goers, the City increasingly gave the RSC a reputation for being less concerned with ensemble performance and connecting with its audiences, and more interested in lavishly designed productions and a reliance on City financial backers.65 This reputation was not completely unfounded; the company received grants from the City of London, which were in addition to those given by the Arts Council of Britain. Yet, Trevor

---

65 Beauman 347.
Nunn’s move to the Barbican did not mean that the RSC grew into an impersonal and staid institution. As in Stratford, the company’s identity fractured and each piece remained closely tied to its particular location.

**Terry Hands: 1986-1991**

When Trevor Nunn left the RSC in 1986, his co-director Terry Hands inherited responsibility for an enormous institution spanning multiple locations and theatres. Hands had joined the RSC in the mid sixties to run the touring company known as Theatregoround. The small operation had been a crucial element in the early development of the RSC, allowing the company to reach a broader section of the English population, not merely in geographic terms, but also in socio-economic ones. By the time Hands took over, his level of experience and knowledge of the companies’ workings was almost unparalleled. His solo tenure, which lasted only five years, generally maintained what he and Nunn had established in the previous decades.

Steven Adler recounts an RSC staff member’s assessment of Hands regime:

> He had a positive attitude about the company and the work, and [under him] the atmosphere was all right. Terry wasn’t artistic director for long enough to effect any real changes in policy—he more or less kept the status quo. 66

> Hands had a unique perspective on the RSC’s relationship to Stratford for the simple fact that he had worked in the town, on and off, for so many years. He seems to have viewed the company’s presence in the town in much the same way Nunn had.

66 Adler 121.
Stratford was a shrine for two separate objects of worship: William Shakespeare and artistic achievement. The RSC imbued the town with the latter through its work. Hands asserted as much during in the 1980s by comparing the RST to a great cathedral. Rebuking the notion that the RSC was part of the heritage industry, he offered the following assessment:

The Stratford industry has nothing to do with us. The Stratford industry is the town of Stratford, which is quite different from the theatre of Stratford. Yes, of course, there is tourism and souvenirs. So what? They exist in the same way that the great cathedrals used to have stalls and prostitutes, dice-players, and three-card tricks, going on all around the buttresses and even inside. So too the great theatre for Shakespeare—and I say it blatantly—is surrounded by money-grubbing vendors. And why not?67

Stratford’s tourism activity could operate alongside the RSC. The company, like a “great cathedral” would be untouched.

The real problems that Hands and successors Adrian Noble and Michael Boyd would face in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries derived from the company’s size and financial structure. Change would be inevitable, but whether it would mean scaling down, splitting apart, or continuing to grow did not come to the fore until Adrian Noble took the helm in 1991.


Noble had joined the RSC in 1980 and quickly distinguished himself as a talented director. He had very little administrative experience, however, and the company he inherited in the early nineties desperately required reorganization. The RSC was too large for a single individual to run and its mission had become blurred. A major reassessment of the company’s identity in regard to geographic location and architectural space began in 1995 with Noble’s decision to shorten the RSC’s season at the Barbican. London, the RSC’s second home, had always been a more precarious location for the company than Stratford. Noble initially operated under the assumptions passed down from Hands, who had argued that despite the company’s difficulties at the Barbican Centre, it remained a vital performance location. Without it, the logic ran, “top actors” might not easily agree to work for the RSC.68

Quickly, however, Noble came to believe that the company could successfully reduce its presence at the Barbican. He announced in the mid nineties that the RSC would shift its priorities from London to becoming a greater national (and international) presence. The company would decrease the length of its season in the capital from eleven months to six months and would tour more in Britain and the

---

68 Hands comments proved that even in the late eighties, Stratford had not completely discarded its image as an out-of-the-way location. The perception of the town was rooted in reality, of course; not until 1991 did a new motorway provide a direct, swift route from London to Stratford.
United States.\textsuperscript{69} The RSC boasted that with its tours and residencies in London and Newcastle, the company truly was a national institution, accessible within an hour’s drive from 80\% of the English population.\textsuperscript{70}

Scaling back at the Barbican in the nineties paved the way for the company’s permanent departure in 2002. In the twenty years the RSC had occupied the Centre, the company had produced some excellent work. Nonetheless, London had proved a turbulent location for the RSC, and Noble wished to alter the company’s dependency on the capital. A staff member of the Barbican, looking back on the relationship between Stratford and London, described what he perceived to be the differences between the two locations:

\begin{quote}
It’s not ill will [between Stratford and London], but Stratford is the company’s theatre, and we’re just lodgers here [at the Barbican]. The City doesn’t allow us to do what we want without their permission. Now, we here believe that London is where it’s at. It’s all very different from Stratford, a lot less cozy maybe, but more exciting. In Stratford, there is a sense amongst many of the staff that ‘Oh, Dad worked here, now I do.’ Here we don’t have that.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

Noble contended that the RSC could rent various spaces in London for specific transfers. The plan would allow the company to stage commercial productions in the West End and more experimental pieces in non-traditional venues. The RSC found mixed success with Noble’s plan; West End theatres were not always readily available at a welcome price. In addition, the RSC’s 2002 season at the Roundhouse—a large

\begin{footnotes}
\item[69] Adler 67.
\item[70] Chambers, “Home Sweet Home” 89.
\item[71] Adler 68.
\end{footnotes}
circular venue in north London that the RSC had occupied briefly before and which was famous for hosting artists such as Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd, and Peter Brook’s post-RSC work—resulted in mixed reviews.

Critics blamed Noble for the variety of problems facing the RSC at the end of the century, including what appeared from the outside to be a shift from “Royal Shakespeare Company” to “Royal Shakespeare Corporation.” The situation progressed to the point that the company’s future lay in question, as Fenton comments:

At the end of the Adrian Noble regime, a situation arose that seemed, from a distance, like an identity crisis. Whatever the facts of the matter, whatever the origins of the dispute, from the outside it looked as if the RSC hated Stratford, hated its audience (provincial and international), hated its own main theatre, hated its London theatre . . . and that’s enough hating to be going on with.72

Fenton exaggerates perhaps, but Noble’s tenure was certainly one of the more stressful periods in the history of the company. In the last year of his regime, many critics and practitioners turned against Noble. Articles criticizing his choices appeared in the major London papers. They attacked him for firing a number of people in the RSC, which Noble claimed was his attempt to streamline operations.

One of the major sources of contention was Noble’s bold announcement that he wanted to demolish and rebuild the RST in Stratford. Noble proposed the building of a new complex along the Avon, on the site of the RST, which would include “various exhibitions and educational initiatives as part of a themed village.” RSC actor Michael Gambon fired back that the plans were “unnecessary” and that he “and many

72 Fenton
others shuddered at the idea of a Warwickshire ‘Shakespeareland.’”  

Noble defended his proposal, asserting that it would not create a theme-park atmosphere, but people protested nonetheless. Over the course of its history, The RSC had been willing enough to accept the advantages of “authority” and “authenticity” that came with being associated with Shakespeare’s birthplace. Although the company outwardly distanced itself from the tourism industry surrounding Shakespeare, it also benefited from it immensely. Busloads of tourists often stop in Stratford on planned itineraries to visit the Shakespeare shrines and catch a matinee. The RSC had maintained its distance from nostalgic Elizabethanism, and Noble’s plan sounded precariously like a shift in that direction. The Shakespeare Village idea struck people as categorically un-RSC.

Many agreed fundamentally with the need for a new theatre; that was not exactly the problem. For decades, practitioners had been calling for a better main performance space. The Swan had pacified some of the discontent with the RST, but the mid-sized theatre was not large enough to serve the company as a primary space. In 2002, actress Sinead Cusack aptly described the RSC’s relationship to the RST as a “bad marriage.” Member of Parliament Chris Bryant added that the building was “monstrous carbuncle.” Aside from aesthetic considerations, many people—audiences, critics, and practitioners—argued that constructing a new theatre was not simply a luxury to improve the RSC, but a necessity. Despite its many alterations

---

since 1932, the theatre would face mandatory remodeling by 2004, when it would be forced to comply with new “statutory requirements, such as disabled access and safety rules.” Instead of updating the space, supporters asked, why not build an entirely new structure. Considering the numerous reasons for rebuilding, the opposition to Noble’s plan stemmed not from outright disagreement on the requirements for a new theatre space, but instead from a mix of sentiments relating to the company’s larger purpose and identity, especially in regard to its relationship to Stratford.

By the beginning of twenty-first century, Stratford-upon-Avon had gone through transformations in size and identity even more notable and significant, perhaps, than the changes in the theatre buildings and the theatre companies that had performed there since the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the town’s heritage was no longer simply about its connection to the life of William Shakespeare. Stratford was now infused with an additional source of sacredness; the legacies of the Memorial Festival and the RSC. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre despite being “vilified and attacked for most of its 75-year history” eventually became “a Shakespearean Mecca” It was, after all, the site of many of the “greatest” performances of the twentieth-century British theatre.

---

75 Chrisafis
The evolution of the RST into a shine in its own right was illustrated in comments published in a 2007 article in *The Guardian*, which included short interviews with various actors who had worked there over the years. Sinead Cusak, although she, in fact, argued for the demolition of the building, recalled the RST fondly:

> I can remember waiting in the wings to go on as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, very early in my career, and thinking “What is an Irish peasant such as myself doing here, on this stage, in Stratford, home of the Bard?” It struck me with such force.

Actor David Warner expressed a similar sentiment:

> “To have been a fan, and then to find myself performing in the same building, was one of the greatest thrills that anybody could have. I look back and think, my God, was I actually allowed to walk on that stage.”

Their observations represent a larger feeling of veneration for the history of performance in Stratford. Audiences, critics, and practitioners had come to idealize “definitive” performances that occurred at the RST. Legends of the British theatre such as Laurence Olivier, Peggy Ashcroft, Richard Burton, Peter O’Toole, Judi Dench, and Ian McKellen, to name but a few (many of whom were knighted for their work) graced the stage of the art deco building. Theatre-enthusiasts still wonder at Peter Hall’s audacity in the 1960s in transforming the Memorial Festival into the RSC; his “revolution” has become legendry. Likewise, admirers revered landmark productions such as Peter Hall’s and John Barton’s *The Wars of the Roses* and Peter Brook’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which opened at the RST in 1963 and 1970,

---

respectively. Stratford was no longer famous simply for Shakespeare’s ghost, flitting along the banks of the Avon, the birthplace on Henley Street, or his burial site at Holy Trinity. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the town was cherished for the “ghosts” of great performances “buried in the walls of Royal Shakespeare Theatre.”

Yet, many people in 2002 were ready to witness the demolition of the old art deco theatre—to, as Tyrone Guthrie commented in the fifties, “bulldoze it and push it into the river”—others, including Prince Charles, lobbied for its preservation.

In 2003, Adrian Noble abruptly resigned from his position as artistic director of the RSC. His critics were glad to see him go, though they didn’t miss another opportunity to lambaste him on his way out. Noble had taken time away from the RSC the previous year to direct the West End musical Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. Almost as soon as the positive reviews for the production came out in the London papers—practically ensuring Noble a money-maker—he quit his post at the RSC. His actions were derided, as he left the company in turmoil.

**Michael Boyd: 2003-2007**

Adrian Noble’s successor was Michael Boyd, who took over the troubled company in 2003 and has already achieved a number of positive changes. He now looks toward a substantially transformation of company and theatre buildings in the future, and he seems quite dedicated to providing the leadership for these changes.

---

78 Suzman, Janet. Interviewed by Paul Arendt. “The Final Curtain.” Michael Billington

79 Quayle 329.
Boyd had worked for the company as a director for a number of years. He understood that one of the primary tasks of his new role would be to stabilize the company’s relationship to its locations and spaces. Critic Michael Billington summed up one of the major issues facing Boyd’s regime in stressing that “although some argue that it is a conservative, 19th-century notion to imagine that a company’s artistic identity depends upon the building it inhabits, there is an equally valid argument that it may risk losing something of its cohesion” when removed from a specific building or location.\footnote{Billington, Michael. “In a World of Dazzle.” The Guardian.} At the beginning of his tenure, Boyd announced that the RSC would proceed with plans for a new main theatre, but that the design would incorporate the 1932 Memorial Theatre, not demolish it. Noble’s proposed Shakespeare Village would not be part of reconstruction.

During his tenure, Boyd has embraced Stratford more than any other RSC artistic director. His willingness to do so, however, says less about his personal preferences than it does about the changes that have occurred in the town over the past few decades. Advances in transportation and communication have made Stratford more desirable for those who wish to stay connected to London. RSC actor Sam West noticed the shift in the company’s attitude:

> We can bring people for a year to this small town in Warwickshire because this is where we do it [theatre]. We don’t want to be in London. We’re not in Stratford because we can’t get into London. We are here because we chose to be. Michael Boyd is saying that. Come here for a year. His return to the ensemble tradition is being forged as we speak.\footnote{West, Sam. Interview. 29 August 2006.}
While some have argued that tourism and accessibility have ruined the Warwickshire town, the RSC has benefited financially from these forces. According to a recent Channel 4 survey, Stratford is now “one of the best places to live in England.” Not surprisingly, the survey ranked the town highly on entertainment and cultural activities.

In addition to Boyd’s plans for a complete transformation of the RST, which began in 2007, he organized an unprecedented year-long season in Stratford called *The Complete Works Festival*. The celebration, which ran from April 2006 to April 2007, included performances and readings of all of Shakespeare’s plays and poems. The RSC produced 23 shows for the festival and invited other British and international companies to Stratford to stage an additional 31 productions. Representatives from around the world accepted, including companies from the United States, Italy, Japan, and Poland, to name a few. Perhaps the most remarkable guest to visit Stratford during the year, with their production of *Richard II*, was the Berliner Ensemble, one of the companies that had first inspired Peter Hall to create the RSC.

*The Complete Works Festival* was a celebration of Shakespeare’s work and, almost equally, a celebration of his hometown. The RSC was focusing attention on Stratford as the provenance of one of the world’s greatest poets. Theatre practitioners were invited to make the pilgrimage from their home country to the sacred site—sacred as much for its performance history as for famous son. Visiting companies felt the significance of the location. For instance, in August 2006, The Shakespeare
Theatre Company of Washington D. C. performed *Love’s Labor’s Lost* at The Complete Works Festival, and members of the ensemble expressed their veneration for the location. Actors Amir Arison and Ted van Griethuysen related their deep enthusiasm about being in Stratford. Arison stated that as an American it was especially exciting to be in the town, along the River Avon, performing the play. “Shakespeare is here,” van Griethuysen added, “not in London.” By “Shakespeare” he meant everything associated with the Bard—his birthplace and burial site as well as the legacy of performance in Stratford.82

Instead of resisting Stratford’s sentimental ties to Shakespeare, the RSC has embraced them in a new way by using various historically significant spaces within the town for performances. For instance, for a production of *Henry VIII*, Stratford town leaders granted the use of Holy Trinity Church as a performance space for the Festival. As actor Sam West noted, for the first time in 400 years, Shakespeare would be “in attendance” at one of his plays.

Boyd took advantage of The Complete Works Festival to promote the new design for the RST. The old theatre closed in April 2007 for the extensive renovations, which are scheduled to last three years. A temporary, test space, the Courtyard Theatre, was erected for the productions. It will serve the RSC as its main home until the reopening of the new RST. Perhaps wishing to avoid the problems that the company has experienced in the past with new theatres, the RSC will be able to make

---

141

---

Arison, Amir and Ted van Griethuysen, Interview. 28 August 2006
changes to the proposed design based on what they learn from working in the Courtyard, essentially a prototype of the new RST. Boyd promises that audiences will be able “see up the actors’ nostrils, and observe the muscles of their eyes,” and the Courtyard will test his claim. Critics are already impressed with the temporary space; reviews to date have been generally positive.

Attached to what was the Other Place, the Courtyard looks like a “container . . . made of interlocking plates of rusting steel.” Under Boyd, the company seems to be settling into a symbiosis with Stratford. The Courtyard Theatre’s architect, Ian Ritchie, applied this shift in attitude in his design with the use of rusty steel for the building: “I call it nature’s own paintbrush,” he said. “It suits Stratford which, with all its brick, is a town that is simply red.” Inside, the theatre is similar to the Swan, only more than double its size, seating roughly 1000 spectators in two tiers around the sides of a long thrust stage.

The positive reception for the Courtyard bodes well for the new RST. The plans for the permanent theatre include restorations of the main façade and foyers, with a return to the “rigorous art deco look created in 1932 by the RST’s architect, Elizabeth Scott.” Tourists will also be able to enjoy new restaurants and café facilities

---

84 Fenton.
on the top floor of the theatre as well as an observation tower with views of Stratford. A new entrance will allow visitors to the RST and the Swan to share the same door. 86

The choices that the RSC has made in recent years reflect not only the company’s reassessment of its relationship to location and architecture, but also of its tacit acknowledgement of the larger changes occurring in Shakespearean performance. For decades, the RSC maintained its status as the leader among Shakespearean companies (and also fared well with its new works productions). The RSC claimed authority in speaking Shakespeare’s language and, despite its contentious relationship to the Bard’s birthplace, the company nonetheless embraced its sacred home. Yet as the RSC entered the twentieth-first century it faced a new challenge: ‘Shakespeare’s original instrument’—the theatre for which he wrote his music—was open again in London, on the South Bank of the Thames.

Case Study: The Wars of the Roses

In 1963 at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the RSC opened The Wars of the Roses, a cycle of history plays that illustrated clearly and effectively the mission of the young company. The production consisted of three plays, Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III, that Peter Hall and John Barton had constructed from Shakespeare’s Henry VI, parts I, II, and III and from Richard III. Hall and Barton cut sections and

added lines to these four plays in order to create the new works. All told, “Barton cut about half of the total text and added some 1400 lines of mock-Elizabethan verse as connective, tightening the political argument of unfamiliar works.”

The cycle was mounted in Stratford as the RSC’s contribution to the nation’s celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare birth. Yet, in this case, commemorating the Bard took on a new meaning; the RSC’s act of “veneration” was markedly different in tone from the productions that had been offered by the Memorial Festival on such occasions. The RSC’s Wars of the Roses demonstrated the company’s new relationship to Stratford and to the notion of the authenticity.

The trilogy was well-received; critics praised the company’s daring and innovation. The very choice of the plays set the tone. Hall and Barton selected plays that were, as James Loehlin describes, “foreign histories.” Richard III was certainly well known and had long been popular partly due its charismatic central figure, but the three parts of the Henry VI were rarely performed. Hall and Barton could more easily reassess Shakespeare with these lesser-known works.

John Bury designed the trilogy. He, Hall, and Barton wanted the visual elements of the set to highlight the actors, the plot, and the political undertones of the Shakespeare’s works. Bury used a large amount of metal in the production—of steel and iron. The rake of the RST was even laid with a steel floor. Bury commented that

---

87 Kennedy 177.
they “were trying to make a world; a dangerous world, a terrible world,” one enveloped by “the great steel cage of war.” The design departed drastically from the settings that typically had been used for Shakespeare’s history plays. Often the histories had been draped in majestic sets and costumes, creating a romanticized medieval realism. Victorian and Edwardian actor-managers had been especially fond of this type of staging for the history plays—Charles Kean, for example, famously mounted lavish “historically accurate” productions of *Richard II* and *Henry V*. And this image of the middle ages as a chivalrous realm of castles, knights, and maidens persisted well into the twentieth century.

The RSC’s *Wars of the Roses* presented a thoroughly unromantic view of the past. The company’s vision was influenced by Brecht’s methods, but also by Hall’s underlying principle of treating Shakespeare more or less as a contemporary playwright. Hall claimed that in examining the history plays he “realized that the mechanisms of power had not changed in centuries.” He believed that “we also were in the middle of a blood-soaked century,” and he “was convinced that the presentation of one of the bloodiest and most hypocritical periods in history would teach many lessons about the present.”

The notion of Shakespeare as a contemporary largely guided the RSC’s appropriation and rejection of Stratford’s heritage. Hall’s position necessarily meant that the memorial aspects of the town had to be extricated from the work of RSC. Bury

---

89 Kennedy 180.  
90 Loehlin 139.
described *The Wars of the Roses* as reducing “historical identity down to essentials,” requiring the company to be true to “the period in silhouette.” Interestingly, the RSC maintained this attitude not merely for this particular production, but towards their historically significant location as well. The essential attributes linking the RSC to Stratford—the fact that it is the Bard’s birthplace and burial place and that it housed the first theatre dedicated solely to Shakespeare—were to be embraced in as much as they served the artistic endeavors of the new company.

*The Wars of the Roses* provides two additional illustrative points in regard to the RSC’s relationship to Stratford and the notion of authenticity. As noted, Hall and Barton always approached Shakespeare’s language with great reverence and attention to detail. Yet in the case of the trilogy, Barton manipulated the text and even added his own lines. Barton and those around him—including actors, designer, and critics—assumed that Stratford and the RSC, along with his Cambridge education, provided Barton with an amount of authority sufficient to alter Shakespeare’s plays. It was a brash assumption. He could apparently speak for the Bard, and simply being in Stratford offered a measure of legitimacy in deciphering and changing the language of Shakespeare. Barton would do this again: in 1973, for instance, he “imported about 500 lines from 2 Henry IV” to give “extra body to the role of Bolingbroke” in an RSC production of *Richard II*.  

---

91 Kennedy 182.
In addition, the trilogy marked the beginning of the RSC’s special interest in Shakespeare’s history plays. Certainly, a number of the histories had been frequently presented at Stratford since the late nineteenth century—Frank Benson was known for his portrayal of Richard II—but the RSC’s approach to the history plays as explicit parallels to the present was new for the town. Shakespeare’s history plays are in many ways quintessentially British—obviously, they describe various events and characters of England’s past but, more importantly, they define aspects the nation’s common identity. Making the plays so central for the RSC’s repertoire linked the company’s mission the heart of England. Their home in the midlands, Shakespeare’s town solidified this connection.
CHAPTER 4
SHAKESPEARE’S GLOBE AND SOUTHWARK

“Where the past exists, the future may flourish”
Peter Ackroyd, *London: the Biography*

According to the Globe Theatre’s website, the current replica of Shakespeare’s theatre came to fruition partly because of one man’s disappointment. In 1949, American actor and director Sam Wanamaker visited London for the first time and, as a devoted Shakespeare enthusiast, ventured into Southwark hoping to find a fitting memorial to the Bard’s Globe. Instead, he discovered only a “tarnished bronze plaque on a brewery wall” acknowledging the site of the theatre. According to the accounts of Wanamaker’s journey, he was baffled by the meager commemoration and resolved on the spot—in that significant location—to reignite people’s awareness of Southwark’s heritage. He began to envision a Globe replica on or near the site of the original playhouse.

---

Location was important to Wanamaker, as was the notion that the 1599 Globe—not Blackfriars, the Theatre, or the Rose (all theatres in which Shakespeare likely worked)—was the Bard’s true playhouse. This focus on the Globe had also been emphasized by a majority of Elizabethan scholars; yet building an exact replica of “Shakespeare’s theatre” would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Little solid evidence about the theatre survived. As Wanamaker’s plan developed, a number of scholars and practitioners encouraged him to consider modernizing the design for his new Globe—a hybrid, they recommended, not a copy. In the end, though, Wanamaker’s convictions about architecture and geography led him and his team to aspire to an unprecedented measure of historical “accuracy” and “authenticity” in the reconstruction.

Because of this commitment to accurate reconstruction, the project of rebuilding the Globe reveals yet another way, beyond circumstances in Stratford-upon-Avon, that a Shakespearean theatre could be linked to a significant place and, in turn, become its own sacred space. Since its inception, the new Globe has attracted and served various people—actors, directors, designers, scholars, architects, builders, and spectators—who sought some kind of authentic return to the origin and “truth” of the plays and productions, if not the playwright himself.

For those involved in the new Globe project, the notion of returning to the original location and space was also linked to uncovering the hidden treasures of Southwark. Since the destruction of the Elizabethan playhouses in the 1640s, the
neighborhood had been shaped by the continued industrial and residential activity of the area. Therefore, initially, the borough of Southwark did not figure prominently in people’s attempts to rebuild Shakespeare’s theatre. The object of interest and veneration was not the land on which Shakespeare’s walked—as was the case in Stratford—or the Elizabethan and Jacobean world of Southwark, which had disappeared. Instead, people only thought about the possibility of rebuilding a version of the Globe itself, a stand-alone structure representing a lost key to Shakespeare’s plays. However, as the twentieth century progressed, attitudes about performance, historical context, and location began to change. As these shifts occurred, new scholarly and archaeological discoveries were unearthed. Slowly, and in a piecemeal process, the Globe was “returned” to Southwark.

In time, as the idea of a rebuilt Globe caught fire, Wanamaker and others began to see potential for a rebirth on Bankside; not simply of the Globe theatre, but of the larger heritage of the area as a dynamic, thriving artistic location. They believed that the geographic area was historically significant enough to infuse the new Globe with what it would need in order to succeed. As Wanamaker explained, something of the magic of Shakespeare’s own work and time could be captured:

A reconstructed Globe, genuinely and carefully researched, and constructed with fidelity to the known facts, will absorb the spirit of the original theatre. People who come to it—whether with superficial curiosity, reverential love or deep appreciation—will experience something of the past.²

² Wanamaker, Sam. Interview with Graham Holderness, 23
While Wanamaker was able to tap the veneration that some people felt towards Shakespeare and the Globe Theatre, a number of critics voiced their strongly felt opposition to the whole project. The responses have echoed those aired in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in regard to Stratford as a site for performance. The parallels between the two locations and theatres are not exact, however. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the various attitudes—political, social, and cultural—concerning Shakespeare’s legacy crystallized in Southwark with the rebuilding of the Globe.

The 1599 Globe

In the late nineteenth century in Warwickshire, Charles Flower had to confront critics who proclaimed that Shakespeare himself had left Stratford in order to write and produce his plays, and that therefore the town was not a good choice for the performance of them. Almost a hundred years later in Southwark, Wanamaker also met opposition, though this time the arguments stemmed from a new set of prejudices. In the case of the new Globe, the historical legacy for performance in Southwark was not in question. In the early seventeenth century, the neighborhood had been home to Shakespeare’s company. Philip Henslowe was the first theatrical entrepreneur to move into Southwark when he built the Rose theatre in 1587 (though the area already housed animal baiting arenas and galleries). From that point to the destruction of the theatres by Puritan leaders in the 1640s, the south bank of the Thames maintained a
number of the most successful acting companies of the time, among other varieties of entertainment. In 1599, Richard and Cuthbert Burbage led the efforts for constructing the Globe theatre, built partially from the dismantled remains of their previous playhouse, the Theatre, which had been located in Shoreditch, north of the City. Shakespeare was part owner of the Globe and wrote many of the plays performed there, including *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth.* From 1599 to 1609, the year in which the company gained access to the Blackfriars theatre in the city, the Globe was the only permanent playhouse in the London area for the Lord Chamberlain’s Men (later the King’s Men), the company of which Shakespeare was a member. The Globe was destroyed in a fire in 1613, and the King’s Men rebuilt it the following year, making a few alterations to the original design, including a tile roof to replace the original thatch covering.

Given this heritage, Wanamaker’s contemporaries did not question Southwark’s significance for Shakespeare performance, but they were concerned about the changes that the neighborhood had undergone over the nearly four centuries separating the original playhouse and the proposed new Globe. In his “biography” of London, which examines the city’s personality over the course its history, Peter Ackroyd characterized Southwark prior to the new Globe era as having an “air of

---


152
exhaustion” and “spent life” about it.\textsuperscript{6} For centuries, including the years that Shakespeare worked there, the borough had a reputation as a vulgar and rough location. In the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, the neighborhood housed a number of infamous prisons and slums (a few of which were depicted by Charles Dickens). Separated by the river from London’s seats of government and business, Westminster and the City, respectively, Southwark attracted institutions, industries, and people who were not always welcome in the center of the metropolis. The area’s proximity to the Thames also meant that it was susceptible to water-borne diseases; in the early nineteenth century, for example, it was one of London’s boroughs most severely hit by cholera outbreaks.\textsuperscript{7}

Certainly not everything about the area was bleak; many industries thrived in the borough. Describing Southwark in the 1860s, John Timbs mentioned manufacturing as the chief activity, including “tan-pits; barge and boat builders, sawyers and timber-merchants. . . hat making, brewing, vinegar yards, and distilleries, glass houses, potteries, and soap and candle works.”\textsuperscript{8} The area continued to attract businesses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when commercial docks were developed, and Southwark became a center for the import of timber.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the parts of Southwark also fared well artistically. Most significantly, Lilian Baylis’ tenure at the Old Vic Theatre (located roughly a mile southwest from the Bankside location of the Elizabethan theatres),

\textsuperscript{7} Powell, Kenneth. \textit{City Reborn 15}.
which lasted from 1912 to 1937, molded the theatre’s identity as an institution
dedicated to the highest quality of work for the widest possible audience. Her legacy
and the subsequent, continued high quality work produced there were so strong that, in
1963, Laurence Olivier used the south London theatre as a temporary home for the
long-awaited National Theatre, which itself was eventually built nearby. Nonetheless,
conditions in many parts of Southwark worsened in the 1960s and 70s. Southwark had
suffered from the effects of bombing during World War II, and thousands of jobs were
lost when the docks were moved and the neighborhood lost its major industry. Even
during its more prosperous times, the area remained, relative to much of London, an
“undeveloped and ill-regarded place.” Many wealthy and middle class Londoners
viewed Southwark as “a poor and disreputable appendage.” According to Ackroyd, the
area suffered from “urban discrimination.”

The history of Southwark, and the prevailing twentieth-century notions about
it, meant that many critics perceived Wanamaker’s plan for a Globe replica in the
neighborhood as willful blindness of a blighted urban environment. The area needed
industry and residences, not an Elizabethan theatre, they argued. As early as the 1940s,
city development councils had been discussing Southwark’s potential future, with
proposals for office buildings and better housing options. One report did mention
briefly the possibility of a reconstructed Globe and museum to benefit the area. The
suggestion was intended as an answer to Southwark’s economic conditions, though,

---

11 Ackroyd 679.
not as an exercise in historical accuracy or as a symbol of artistic commitment.\textsuperscript{12}

Nothing came of the plans, however: World War II, and the subsequent recovery from bombing, postponed all construction in the area.

Yet in the 1960s, Southwark’s dramatic heritage slowly began to emerge again. Historians and Shakespeare enthusiasts, searching for anything related to the Bard in the capital, focused their attention on the Bankside of the Thames. They might have looked elsewhere; Shakespeare also had worked at Blackfriars theatre, which had been located inside the City walls, north of the Thames. He also inhabited at various times a number of residences in the London area, including places near Shoreditch, Southwark, and St. Paul’s Cathedral.\textsuperscript{13} Nonetheless, these disparate locations never captured people’s historical imagination in that way that the site of the Globe theatre did, and continues to do in the twenty-first century. Largely, this is due to the fact that Globe sat among other Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouses. The interest in the Globe represents a larger fascination for Shakespeare’s theatre world—peopled with historical figures such as Ben Jonson and Richard Burbage. Also, for theatre practitioners in particular, the plays and their original productions carried far more significance than did the poet’s living quarters, which were, in any case, almost exclusively associated with Stratford (even though Shakespeare had mainly lived in London, with only occasional visits back to Stratford where his family apparently remained.).

\begin{itemize}
\item Day 33.
\end{itemize}
None of the theatres tied to Shakespeare and his contemporaries survived beyond the mid-seventeenth century, though. Without tangible structures, such as the Shakespeare shrines in Stratford-upon-Avon, pilgrims had nothing to admire or venerate in Southwark. Any romantic notions of what Shakespeare’s theatre world might have been like were disassociated from the present-day Southwark, a place radically altered by the intervening centuries. The memory of the Elizabethan borough was more of an imaginary dream of Bard enthusiasts than it was a viable pilgrimage destination. Travelers wishing to connect with material objects related to Shakespeare typically went to Stratford, not to Southwark.

Early twentieth century historians could not even agree about the exact location of the original Globe theatres. The remains, buried under centuries of human activity, were lost. Divorced, then, from a specific geographic point, the history of interest in the Globe Theatre developed almost entirely outside of Southwark.

The earliest significant attempt at reconstructing an Elizabethan playhouse occurred in Germany when Ludwig Tieck led the effort in the 1830s. Inspired by the research of British historian Edmond Malone (1741-1812), Tieck wished to explore the performance space that Shakespeare had used—one that was, when he looked at the historical record, quite “alien” to the nineteenth-century proscenium theatre. Tieck had long harbored a desire to ‘test’ an Elizabethan-style stage; he was a devoted Shakespeare enthusiast and even wrote a novel, published in 1828, about a young carpenter trying to realize the dream of his mentor in creating an Elizabethan stage for
a production of *Twelfth Night*. In 1836, Tieck collaborated with architect Gottfried Semper on a reconstruction of the Fortune Theatre. Then, famously, in 1843, he tested a number of his theories with a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (with Mendelssohn’s score) performed on a platform stage.\(^{14}\)

Theatre practitioners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued the search for information about the design of Elizabethan theatres. One intriguing piece of evidence surfaced in 1888 with the discovery of a copy of a sketch of the Swan Theatre. The drawing was originally done by Johannes DeWitt, a Dutch traveler who visited the south bank theatre in 1596. Arend Van Buchell, DeWitt’s friend, replicated the sketch and his copy is the one that survives today, which depicts the interior of the theatre—a view that had been lost for centuries. However, issues of accuracy and scale in the drawing stirred much debate: scholars asked what DeWitt’s intention were in recording the scene, how skillful he was in depicting what he actually saw, and how close Van Buchell’s copy was to DeWitt’s original. Given these variables, the drawing could not be relied upon for an exact depiction of the Elizabethan theatre. Still, the sketch was all that scholars and practitioners had, and many, particularly William Poel, were influenced by the platform stage depicted in the drawing.

---

In England, Poel paved the way for an Elizabethan theatre revival. With his Elizabethan Stage Society, Poel sought to reclaim Shakespeare’s playing space by experimenting with thrust stages and more circular audience configurations. He and his followers, the Elizabethanists, looked to the surviving evidence, such as the Swan drawing, to gain a closer understanding of the original playhouse conditions for performance. They experimented with swift verse-speaking and minimal scenery. Poel considered himself a reformer, “even a revolutionary,” though, in truth, he maintained a “high-minded Victorian” notion of Shakespeare as a pursuit primarily suited for the educated elite.\(^{15}\)

The focus for Poel was on the specifics of the Elizabethan stage, not on the larger dynamics of Southwark as an entertainment district. As had been the case for Tieck, experimenting with Elizabethan theatre designs did not require Poel to go to South London. Poel constructed models of the early theatres—one of the Fortune Theatre and one of the Globe—but despite his efforts, he never succeeded in building the necessary support for a permanent full-scale replica in Britain.

Nevertheless, the Elizabethanists championed the notion that a reconstructed Globe might serve as a home for a national theatre, joining the on-going debate about the future of such an institution. Poel even briefly investigated possible building sites near the original Globe.\(^{16}\) Given that Shakespeare was the established national poet, a replica of the Globe would be, the Elizabethanists argued, an appropriate choice for a

---


\(^{16}\) Day 18.
national theatre. There were, however, a number of shortcomings to this plan. Shakespeare, of course, would not be the only British playwright to be produced in a national theatre, making the space potentially inappropriate. Moreover, as Dennis Kennedy noted, the Elizabethanists vision was romantic and somewhat naïve: “Romantic because it implied that a work’s initial situation was privileged, and naïve because it assumed that the theatre [community] would care to alter a commercially successful practice for the sake of stylistic experiment.”¹⁷

In 1912, a temporary Globe was constructed in London for the “Shakespeare’s England” exhibition at Earl’s Court. Architect Edward Lutyens designed a structure based partially on Poel’s models. Lutyens built his working Globe replica to a slightly reduced scale; though certainly large enough for crowds of spectators to watch short performances at the Earl’s Court Exhibition.¹⁸ The replica was an approximation, as were all early attempts to reconstruct the theatre. Practitioners were more interested in experimenting with the general configuration of the stage and auditorium than with determining every detail of scale, building material, and ornamentation that would eventually challenge (and sometimes plague) the architects and builders of the new Globe. In the early twentieth century, the interest in models and replicas represented an awareness of the scholarly and practical problems of determining the exact size and look of the original theatre. Models and approximate replicas served as diversionary

¹⁷ Kennedy 34.
alternatives to proscenium theatres, but not as serious substitutes. Actors, designers, and directors could explore Elizabethan-style spaces, and tourists might appreciate them as curiosities to enjoy. “Proper” Shakespeare, however, generally remained behind the proscenium arches of the West End, best illustrated by the spectacle productions of Herbert Beerbohm Tree.

In the 1930s, the Mermaid Shakespeare Society put forth a proposal to build a Globe replica in Southwark, though the idea never went beyond the planning stages. The society proposed the building of a combination Globe-inspired theatre adjoining a tavern and a library in Southwark. They based their reconstruction plans on Cornelius Visscher’s 1616 engraving of London’s south bank, which included an octagonal structure believed to be an accurate representation of the Globe. In 1948, scholar I.A. Shapiro disproved the reliability of Visscher’s representation, thus putting in doubt the Mermaid Society’s plan. Their aspirations were further thwarted when the site they hoped to acquire was instead slated for the construction of a power station.

Temporary models and failed attempts in Britain aside, over a dozen permanent Elizabethan theatre replicas were constructed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to “varying degrees of faithfulness.”19 All of them were built outside of the United Kingdom. Geographic location was not especially important to those wishing to create Elizabethan spaces. The many scholars and practitioners who

---

assumed that a Shakespearean space would illuminate the Bard’s original intentions for his plays did not consider the heritage and personality of Southwark to be necessary components for their experimental productions.

Yet as the twentieth century progressed, scholars, in particular, became increasingly interested in the original site of Shakespeare’s playhouse. Historically, the vast majority of academic studies on Shakespeare had focused on the play texts. But in the twentieth century as more attention was being paid to the Globe Theatre itself and to performance history, interest in the larger historical context that influenced the plays also increased.

The first significant act in Southwark—a commemorative, not a scholarly, one—came in 1909, when the Shakespeare Reading Society placed a memorial tablet at what they presumed to be the site of the Globe. The group also began organizing annual birthday celebrations in Southwark, which a London guidebook later recommended for tourists: “yearly on the Saturday nearest to Shakespeare’s birthday (23 April) [at the tablet marking the original Globe theatre], scenes from one of the plays are performed.”

In the 1920s, historical interest in the area heightened when W.W. Braines and George Hubbard publicly debated the precise location of the Globe. Part of what had spurred their research was the Shakespeare Reading Society’s tablet—both men were concerned about the placement of it. They published their respective views about

---

whether the Globe had been situated north or south of Maiden Lane. The title of 
the North of Maiden Lane, Bankside, Southwark*, summed up his position against what 
he considered the “topsy-turvy arrangement” that Braines held. In 1924, Braines 
retorted and essentially won the dispute (and assured the public that the 
commemorative tablet was in the right location). More telling than the outcome, 
however, were the methods used by both men. They consulted detailed maps, made 
close examinations of the legal documents related to the Globe, and examined 
numerous seventeenth-century panoramic views of London to support their cases. 
Hubbard and Braines methodically traced the history of the Globe site. They 
maintained a factual, rather than a sentimental, tone about the area and its significance. 
Although their purpose was to gain historical knowledge, not to reconstruct the 
theatre, they laid the foundation for the type of historical research that would later 
consume academics working on the new Globe project.

As the debate over the plaque and location of the Globe illustrates, attention 
focused on Southwark was notably different from that given to Stratford. Not only 
were the two locations vastly at odds in terms of their personalities—with Stratford 
considered sylvan and picturesque while Southwark was seen as harsh and urban—the 
people interested in each area had varying motives. Scholars and Shakespeare 
enthusiasts faced more of a challenge in recovering historical and sentimental material 
from Southwark than from Stratford. They tended to approach the Bankside of the
Thames with an interest in discovering the lost “truths” about the performance of the plays, not with basking in the nostalgic glow of a rural environment defined by sacred buildings and spaces. A number of the most prominent Shakespeare historians of the twentieth century, including Bernard Beckerman, I.A. Shapiro, Richard Hosley, John Orrell, and James Shapiro, attempted to unlock clues to Shakespeare’s life and works by examining the history and location of the playhouses in Southwark. Their investigations and arguments about the architecture of the theatres and of the neighborhood kept interest in Southwark relatively historical, with little or no direct concern with the developing campaigns for the reconstruction of a playhouse until the 1980s.

**The New Globe**

Sam Wanamaker altered Shakespeare enthusiasts’ relationship to Southwark by creating a monument to the Bard in London. Nonetheless, he maintained the scholarly tone that had defined people’s interest in the area by championing an objective method for rebuilding the Globe theatre. Wanamaker even insisted that Bardolatry—of the kind one would find in Stratford—was not part of his agenda: “I have no interest in Bardolatry: the quasi-religious ceremony and reverential verbiage seems to me ludicrous.” He added, “I think it’s possible to separate the true value of the material itself [i.e. Shakespeare’s drama] from the nonsense that surrounds it.”

---

Wanamaker’s interest in the Globe theatre was influenced by his first significant experience with Shakespeare’s plays. At the 1934 Chicago “Century of Progress” exhibition, a fifteen-year old Wanamaker witnessed performances inside a temporary, mock Globe (similar to the Earl’s Court model), which was on display in the British Pavilion of the fair.\textsuperscript{22} Ben Iden Payne, who would become director of the Stratford Memorial Festival the following year in 1935, had brought a small company to Chicago to produce cut versions of the Bard’s plays. At the exhibition, Iden Payne hoped to demonstrate the architectural and theatrical attributes of an Elizabethan performance space. Wanamaker, by his own account, was captivated by what he saw and from that point onward associated the magic of Shakespeare’s plays with the Elizabethan-style theatre structure and design.

Years later, as Wanamaker developed his ideas about a proper commemoration for Shakespeare in Southwark, he saw the potential to combine the practical experience that he and the twentieth-century Elizabethanists had discovered inside the stage replicas with the growing scholarly understanding of late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century theatres. His interest in rebuilding the Globe, then, was motivated in part by his faith in the potential of an old space to unleash new insight to Shakespeare’s plays. He argued that the open air theatre, with a thrust stage and a partially standing audience, would be so drastically different from current theatres that visitors would experience something not archaic, but rather entirely refreshing and

\textsuperscript{22} Gurr 32.
even modern in its strangeness. Wanamaker asserted that “live theatre needs the unfamiliar, the frightening;” Elizabethan spaces, in his opinion, could provide this type of spark.²³

Had novel and experimental Shakespeare been his only ambitions, however, the project would not have been strikingly different from the other Elizabethan-style theatre replicas already built in various places. Two major factors set Wanamaker’s Globe apart from the rest: his insistence that it be constructed on or near the site of the original theatre in Southwark and his dedication to scholarly historical “accuracy.” These ideals, in turn, were fed by his personal feelings about the historical significance of London Southwark and by his populist notion, supported by his leftist politics, that the new Globe would somehow give Shakespeare back to the “people.”²⁴

Those involved in the Globe project understood that fidelity to the historical record would matter more in Southwark than it had in any other location where a replica had been attempted. Building in England, on the south bank, mandated “getting it right,” and the ramifications of not doing so might be disastrous. Early on, critics accused Wanamaker of promoting a simple-minded vision; “accuracy” for such a project would be literally impossible, they argued. Critics avowed that, aside from the disagreements among scholars about the historical records, audiences witnessing productions at a Globe replica would not be Elizabethan and, therefore, the entire

²³ Gurr 32.
²⁴ Wanamaker’s political leanings spurred him to move to England in the first place. In the early 1950s he was blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee on suspicion of communist sympathies. At that point, he decided to move his family to London permanently.
notion of accuracy would be lost. Yet Wanamaker was very much aware of the research and construction challenges of such an endeavor. His notion of accuracy was tempered by the understanding that the final product would only ever be a “best guess,” based on the most recent—but undeniably incomplete—knowledge. Nonetheless, his desire to build was rooted in a belief that part of history—part of British, established, and celebrated history—could be recovered for the present.

Tied to this belief was Wanamaker’s argument that Shakespeare’s plays had originally been entertainment for all people. He asserted that the evolution of the plays into something refined and high-brow had occurred in part because of the theatre spaces in which they were now performed:

The early theatre with its open stage, and before it the platform in the inn-yard or the booth stage in the street, offered an accessible event open to all: a show like the circus or other forms of popular street-entertainment. We have lost the popular public theatre through . . . changes in theatrical architecture. The closed space of the new theatre became the prerogative of the bourgeoisie . . . The Globe will make the theatre (not only Shakespeare) popular again, public and accessible: the working class man will feel less constrained and inhibited there than in the plush, enclosed space of a bourgeois theatre.\(^{25}\)

The assumption was that, in maintaining “accuracy,” the Globe project would also recapture the original, “intended” audience demographic for the plays. Critics countered that this notion was a “naively a-historical assertion.” They saw Wanamaker’s vision of an “essential ‘Shakespeare,’” which the reconstruction of the Globe would somehow “naturally release,” as false and misleading.\(^{26}\)

---

\(^{25}\) Wanamaker 21.

Reaching out to the local population of Southwark—what Wanamaker understood as Shakespeare’s contemporary intended audience—required effort. In the mid-twentieth century, Southwark’s heritage was literally hidden; historical and archaeological finds that would “release” insight about the plays and their original conditions were yet to come. In the 1970s and ’80s, Wanamaker set about convincing people, particularly those on the borough council, that the area held valuable resources for its inhabitants—resources that were not being tapped. As much as Wanamaker envisioned the Globe as an international institution, he insisted on its benefits for the inhabitants of South London:

We always saw ourselves as having two faces: one looking north, across the river to the wider world; and the other facing south to the locality, and to the people of Southwark and the other south London boroughs. We never abandoned the belief that we were local, national and international in character.27

He claimed that he was “seeking the kind of community participation that would keep us informed of and sensitive to local needs.”28 Wanamaker acknowledged the uphill battle he faced when he noted that though “in Southwark, Shakespeare is part of the popular heritage . . . many people don’t know about that heritage.”29 As late as the 1980s, people who lived in the area did not associate it particularly with Shakespeare.

27 Wanamaker 21.
28 Wanamaker 18.
29 Wanamaker 19.
This point was highlighted when the filmmaker of a 1984 documentary for British television walked around Southwark and asked residents what the name “Shakespeare” brought to mind; overwhelmingly people replied, “Stratford.”

Reminding people of Shakespeare’s ties to the area was not the only challenge Wanamaker faced. Southwark had none of the infrastructure typically associated with a successful entertainment district and, instead, had a number of pronounced strikes against it. The neighborhood was difficult to reach by public transportation and by foot. There were no nearby tube stops or easily accessible footbridges across the Thames, and there were very few eating and drinking establishments to invite theatre-goers. Also, the theatre’s proposed geographic placement, along the Thames, would mean that were it eventually built, the open-air design would face the problem of urban noise. The Thames riverway, as Andrew Gurr has noted, “was [and is still] used by helicopters as the only safety route through town [making] overhead noise a constant hassle.”

Undeterred by these kinds of concerns, Wanamaker in the 1960s and ‘70s envisioned the potential of the area. He believed that transportation and tourist facilities would follow as the Globe project forged ahead. The location was paramount in his vision.

The first step in achieving his goal was to found the Globe Playhouse Trust in 1970 to organize and raise money for the reconstruction. Wanamaker also immediately began entreating the academic community. He earned their official

---

30 Gurr, Andrew. Interview. 21 August 2006
31 Gurr Interview.
support in 1971 when 500 scholars from 26 countries agreed at a conference in Vancouver that the Globe project “had merit.” The involvement of historians and archaeologists in the reconstruction of the theatre set Wanamaker’s endeavor apart from similar, past projects, as well as from other existing Shakespearean companies. The marriage of scholarship and practice would become a defining aspect of the Globe—one that has been both beneficial and constraining. In the early stages of Wanamaker’s planning, however, the academic community’s support proved invaluable, as Globe director Tim Carroll noted, “the Globe was really brought into being thanks to the scholars. In the seventies and eighties when the theatre profession were not really interested [in the project], it was the scholars who kept it going.”

Through the Globe Trust, Wanamaker built a team of historians, archaeologists, and architects to realize his dream. Among them were John Orrell and Andrew Gurr, the principal scholars for the project, and Theo Crosby, the head architect. (Sadly, Crosby passed away in 1994 before the completion of the Globe. His replacement was Jon Greenfield.) Wanamaker conceived of the reconstruction of the Globe in its original neighborhood as the foundation for what might be a new “Elizabethan Shaftesbury Avenue.” For critics of the project, this attitude was part of the problem. London already had a theatre district with its modern-day Shaftesbury Avenue in the West End. And in 1976, London welcomed the new National Theatre

---

32 Day 61.
33 Carroll, Tim. Interview. 16 August 2006
34 Day, Barry. This Wooden “O”. 28.
complex, also built in a contested spot—along the south bank of the Thames about a mile west of the proposed Globe site. One theatre on the southbank was quite enough in the eyes of many people.

The greatest force of opposition that Wanamaker and his team faced, however, came from the Southwark Borough Council. For years, the council wavered on its decisions about how the potential site of the new Globe, the Greenmore Wharf site, should be appropriated. The North Southwark Community Development Group, for instance, felt that the land should be used for council houses. For Wanamaker, the argument was about the special value of historically significant land. He understood the geographic location to be a cultural and economic asset for Southwark:

We agreed that there should be housing close by: but to take the prime sites that have national and international significance and value—when housing could be built elsewhere—is the destruction of cultural and social values, and of a potential public amenity accessible to all.35

In 1982, the disagreement escalated into a legal battle over property rights. Four years later, the Globe Trust eventually prevailed in the dispute, but not without suffering large financial and public relations setbacks. Perhaps the most colorful—and serious—episode was the reaction noted by the press of a group of Southwark road-sweepers. “If Shakespeare moves in ‘ere, I’m moving out,” was the comment quoted in the London newspapers, expressed by one of the road-sweepers upset that the Globe would supplant a proposed road-sweep depot.36

35 Wanamaker 17.
36 Drakakis 30-31.
As had been the case for the Stratford Memorial Festival, opposition to the Globe stemmed from issues to do with location. Yet the history of Southwark and the current conditions of the neighborhood meant that the reaction to the Globe was far more political in nature than it had been for the Stratford Festival. Elite London critics had mocked performance in Warwickshire; in Southwark, proponents of low-income housing and local road-sweepers worried about their jobs protested the construction of the Globe. The conflict was not simply an issue of cultural taste. Building a monument to high culture in a historically depressed neighborhood generated fierce debates about the place—literally—of Shakespeare in British society. Moreover, Wanamaker as an American, an outsider, heightened the feeling of opposition held by many in the area, and in the larger theatrical community. In Stratford, an insider, Charles Flower, had championed the hometown hero; in Southwark, a “pushy” American, as he was sometimes described, led the efforts in the name of Shakespeare. Wanamaker countered people’s prejudices by reminding his opponents that he too lived in the borough. An expatriate since 1952, he had moved his family from Highgate to South London in the early seventies. Wanamaker was unshaken by naysayers, adamant that his project of reclamation was for everyone—including the very people who opposed it.

37 Drakakis 30.
38 Day 60.
Over the course of its history, the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford had bolstered its reputation and legitimacy, at least officially, by linking Shakespeare with national and royal approval. The queen is the company’s patron and the Prince of Wales its president. This official identity protected and enhanced the RSC and its mission, even when the RSC’s productions often engaged in political critiques of the government by means of productions motifs and themes. These political messages especially during the years of the Thatcher government, engendered contentious and often angry responses from conservatives and traditionalists. Nonetheless, the RSC remained a leading professional company, protected doubly by the royal name and that of the revered Shakespeare.

The Globe, instead, sought to claim Shakespeare as a man of the people. Neither the building nor the company that came to occupy it would seek any royal identity or protection. The qualities of the building and the plays would serve to justify the project. And the audiences, drawn from all levels of society and parts of the globe, would gather in the space to celebrate the greatness of Shakespeare’s achievement: a theatre for and of the people. To spread this message, in 1972, Wanamaker organized the first of many summer Shakespeare festivals in Southwark. The events included a birthday celebration in April followed by a six-week series with guest speakers, performances and, ironically, a gala concert with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in Southwark Cathedral. Spectators witnessed a modern-dress Hamlet and a Malaysian-

39 Holderness 22.
themed *Macbeth*, which were selected in part to demonstrate the Globe Trust’s mission as an international organization interested in not simply the past, but the present as well. Wanamaker marketed the event as a family outing for the people of London, especially those of South London. The festival generated a good deal of attention. Some critics praised the effort, while others drew parallels to past commemorative celebrations. Describing the event, *The Evening Standard* proclaimed, “Welcome to Stratford-on-Thames.”

In the seventies and eighties, as Wanamaker gathered financial and popular support, the scholars, architects, and craftsmen on his team began the arduous task of deciphering all surviving evidence on the original Globe. The attention to detail and the collaboration among widely varying fields of expertise was truly unprecedented. The project relied on scholarly analysis of the plays (what the implied stage directions would prescribe or suggest), surviving pictorial evidence and first-hand accounts, archaeological remains, examination of surviving Tudor timber-frame structures in England, and dissection of Tudor iconography. Added to this analysis were specialists in Tudor brickwork, traditional carpentry and thatching techniques, and Tudor ironwork, locks, and hinges. Andrew Gurr described the long process as “trying to make up a jigsaw puzzle when you do not know what the finished picture is.”

Often, as one aspect of the design came into focus, a new discovery might alter it. Flexibility was paramount to incorporate the shifting analysis of the existing

---

40 Day 62-6.
41 Gurr 35.
evidence. The team operated under what they called the “best guess” technique. Although the method might sound problematic, it was, in fact, a rigorous attempt to overcome the obvious challenges inherent in such a project. Where evidence was slight, contradictory, or non-existent, architects and engineers had to make informed decisions. “Best guess” choices resulted from months and, in some cases, years, of investigation and debate. Nonetheless, this adaptability, not surprisingly, drew intense criticism. Many in the scholarly and theatrical communities regarded the Globe team’s system of “best guesses” as an affirmation that the project was ultimately futile. What could one learn from such an endeavor, they asked, if the results were necessarily uncertain or even wrong.

The Globe team forged ahead regardless, though they too found that allegiance to “best guess accuracy” was not always possible. Current safety laws had to be obeyed, which forced a few notable alterations to the design. For example, initially, due to fire regulations, the new Globe was to have a tile roof instead of the thatch covering of the 1599 theatre. Fortunately for the purists, a flame-retardant spray for thatch roofs became available in the 1980s and allowed the Globe team to proceed with their original wishes. (The current roof incorporates a sprinkler system as well.)\(^{42}\) Theo Crosby, the lead architect, also was required to add extra staircases for exits.

\(^{42}\) Gurr 35.
In addition to safety regulations, the new theatre would have to conform to certain contemporary expectations. These were relatively easy to solve: lavatories, a gift shop, a café, and a foyer were placed in a structure that surrounds the playhouse. Undoubtedly, the very proximity of such modern-day comforts alters the theatre-goer’s experience of “authenticity,” but many felt that these compromises were necessary for the new Globe to function as a viable twenty-first century theatre.

Perhaps the most significant boost to the project both in terms of raising interest for its future and in influencing its design came from two startling discoveries made in the late eighties: the unearthing of the remains of the Rose Theatre and the original Globe theatres. In 1989, the foundation of the Rose was found, by accident, when preparation for a new office building in Southwark exposed the Elizabethan theatre remains underneath. The find was well-publicized because contractors still wanted to build on the spot, placing the future of the remains in jeopardy. A number of famous theatre practitioners, notably Ian McKellen, Peggy Ashcroft, Laurence Olivier, Timothy Dalton, and Peter Hall rallied for the “Save the Rose” campaign, which culminated in a compromise between the builders and the conservationists. The site is now preserved in Rose Court, a designated basement space, which tourists can visit, underneath the now-completed office building. The original Globe, however, did not fare as well through the centuries. A 1989 evaluation of a small section of the site believed to have been home to the Globe provided mixed information. The excavation did find partial remains of the theatre, but it also revealed, as archaeologist Simon
Blatherwick noted, that “activity subsequent to the demolition of the Globe” in the seventeenth century has caused such “large scale destruction and disturbance” that any “definitive conclusions are hard to come by.” Moreover, the majority of the archaeological remains are buried under Anchor Terrace, an early nineteenth-century building preserved by English Heritage (much to the chagrin of the Globe enthusiasts).

Despite these obstacles, the effects of the two discoveries on the new Globe were far-reaching. With material evidence of real Elizabethan playhouses around the corner, Wanamaker’s reasons for wanting to build in Southwark seemed suddenly more legitimate. As the historical significance of the borough became literally visible, veneration of the sort usually reserved for Stratford increased significantly in Southwark.

Yet at the same time, the new information also provided support for those who opposed the idea and aim of the rebuilt Globe. Archaeologists now had the measurements of an actual Elizabethan theatre, the Rose, and they did not match the architectural design slated for the new Globe. The Rose, they discovered, had been considerably smaller than the theatre they were planning to build from Crosby’s draft. The original Globe, of course, was not a copy of the Rose but, as Peter Thomson surmised, the archaeological remains of the Rose “proffer different conclusions from those represented in the new Globe, [and] they function as a critique of the reconstruction.” The remains of the Rose and Globe reinforced to all involved in the

---

43 Blatherwick 79.
project—particularly to the critics—the myriad problems with attempting to achieve historical accuracy. For instance, one discovery revealed that the size of the Rose stage had been enlarged over the course of the theatre’s operation, which bluntly reminded scholars and architects that the structure they were trying to recreate with the new Globe was, in its own time, not fixed. Elizabethan theatres, as historians had already shown and archaeologists had concurred, were not static, memorialized buildings. Yet, the new Globe would be precisely that: a “best guess,” fixed Globe.

The Rose and Globe discoveries elicited both positive and negative reactions, but ultimately they heightened people's awareness of Southwark’s heritage. The borough also gained a number of pilgrims and tributes. Yet as important as these developments were for the commemorative aspects of Wanamaker’s vision, Andrew Gurr warned against what he saw as a potentially dangerous side-effect: “The stones [of the original Globe] are being treated as objects of worship, not information.” He added, “the trouble with idolatry is that it conceals ignorance about what you worship.”\footnote{Day, 211} Indeed, today many visitors to the new Globe also tour the remains of the Rose and stop at the site of the original Globe. Upon entering the dark, underground space of the Rose—which is outlined by strings of dim, red lights—the tour guides, speaking in hushed tones, often remind people that William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe walked here, on this very spot. Guides also provide information about the archaeological work at the site, but their tours invoke primarily a sense of
dramatic reverence. As scholar Johanna Schmitz has noted, “the commodity the visitors take away is that they have experienced the location of the Rose Theatre much like one might visit a gravesite.”

Many people worried that the new-found attention to Southwark would result in a Disneyland-like spectacle for the area. When the new Globe theatre finally opened for a “prologue season” in 1996 (after an ‘experimental’ season in 1995 in which the actors tested the space) various London theatre practitioners assumed that the structure would produce only embarrassing, pseudo-Elizabethan-style Shakespeare productions.

Yet Wanamaker and his team carefully attempted to avoid this pitfall, and one of the important decisions in preventing an artificial Elizabethan festival was the choice of artistic director for the Globe Company. Before Wanamaker’s untimely death in 1993, he selected Mark Rylance for the job. An actor gifted with the ability to, as Al Pacino remarked, “play Shakespeare like Shakespeare wrote it for him the night before,” Rylance shared Wanamaker’s desire to “explore old structures for new theatre.” His interest in the reconstruction in many ways paralleled Wanamaker’s assertions about the relevance of the Globe for today. Rylance commented that he did

---

47 Day, Barry, 137.
49 White 221.
not feel that the new Globe was “an old-fashioned space at all.” He emphasized rather, “I feel I am in the most modern theatre there is.” Rylance approached his work at the Globe not as a mandate to be Elizabethan, but as an opportunity to experiment with the shape and feel of the thrust playing space, with the outdoor conditions, and with the surrounding circular configuration of the audience:

This Globe, this roughly circular theatre, with its roughly square stage, two-thirds revealed and one-third hidden behind the frons scenae, and its huge triangular gable supported on the pillars of Hercules, may help us to tap into the meaning of Shakespeare in new and powerful ways.\(^{52}\)

Rylance’s acting talent and philosophical approach were not the only things that set him apart as an appropriate choice for artistic director. Born in England, but reared in the United States, Rylance sympathized with Wanamaker’s “outsider” appreciation for Britain’s material ties to Shakespeare: “I was brought up about a hundred miles north of Chicago, where Sam lived, and shared for this reason perhaps some of his interests and convictions.”\(^{53}\)

Wanamaker had believed that Southwark would lend the spirit of its history to the new theatre, but Rylance took this notion further. Rylance is candid about what he considers the metaphysical qualities of certain historical locations: he embraces the idea that sacred space is relevant to the dynamics of performance. Rylance had a history of working in places that he considered significant or sacred before coming to the Globe. In 1991, his company Phoebus Cart performed *The Tempest* at three

\(^{51}\) White 222.  
\(^{52}\) Rylance 175.  
\(^{53}\) Rylance, 169.
different special sites: the Rollright Stones, a Bronze Age stone circle, roughly twenty miles south of Stratford-upon-Avon; the ruins of Corfe Castle in Devon; and the planned site of the new Globe. Rylance was interested in the mystical properties of these locations and he brought his beliefs about place and metaphysics with him when he started his work at the Globe. Andrew Gurr noted, for example, that Rylance was “hugely reassured that there was a ley line going across the Globe” and that he valued its north-eastern directional orientation.\(^5^4\) In an act of commemoration and perhaps communion with the Bard, Rylance celebrated the 1995 anniversary of Shakespeare’s birthday by leading a processional through the city’s sacred Bard sites. The tribute began at the Shakespeare statue in Westminster Abbey, passed through Middle Temple Hall, then stopped at the half-finished new Globe, and ended at Southwark Cathedral.\(^5^5\) This physical linking of these various sites inaugurated, in a sense, the new Globe. Rylance was adding the new theatre to the list of suitable veneration destinations for Shakespeare within the capital.

Another important source of geographical inspiration for Rylance was the River Thames. Tim Carroll discussed the significance of the river for Rylance, noting its “strange quality” that “whereas everything is different about London—nothing at all looks the same—in Shakespeare’s time, the river [was] the same.” Carroll added

\(^5^4\) Ley lines are straight lines that allegedly run through many ancient sites. They are thought to possess mystical or magical energy and to connect sacred sites such as stone circles, pyramids, and ancient monuments. Also referenced: Gurr. Interview and Rylance, 169.

\(^5^5\) Wiles, David. *A Short History of Western Performance Space*. 59.
that the river became a symbol for some of the actors at the new Globe, especially for Rylance (not unlike the River Avon was for Frank Benson and his company in the late nineteenth century in Stratford):

> Even though in fact the river is changing more rapidly than anything else—because it is always flowing—the river became quite a useful image for us [actors and directors] of something which is somehow always flowing and not standing still, and paradoxically more connected to the ancient past than any static thing.\(^{56}\)

Perhaps troubling to some Shakespeare scholars and enthusiasts, Rylance also holds unorthodox views about the question of authorship for Shakespeare’s plays, lending his celebrity status to champion various theories for alternative penmen. Some critics mocked his beliefs with the charge that a “heretic” had taken over at the Globe. In terms of the notion of sacred space, however, Rylance’s beliefs are worth examining, especially due to his own professed interest in spiritually significant performance locations. Stratford’s significance, for example, dissolves for those who believe that someone other that William Shakespeare wrote the plays. The location becomes a false shrine, and thus a mockery maintained by the idolatry of a counterfeit playwright. By contrast, even if one believes that Shakespeare did not write the plays, Southwark maintains it vital significance as a historical place. Whoever wrote the plays, the author conceived of them, at least in part, for the shape and location of the Globe.

---

\(^{56}\) Carroll, Interview.
For Rylance, the significance of the geographic location of the Globe and its proximity to the Thames along with the design of the new structure provided a powerful tool to help decipher the meaning of the plays:

My firm belief is that Shakespeare intended . . . meaning to be found in the imaginary space between the audience and the actor, hence the absolute necessity to explore the architecture that Shakespeare chose to define that space. I am certain that the space he chose, especially with a name like the Globe, will help to reveal much meaning through the authentic relationship between plays and audiences. . . . The geometric forms of the Globe’s architecture, and the emblematic language of its decorative schemes, have much to reveal . . .

Theatre practitioners and scholars examining every detail of the texts now had an ally, of sorts, in the architecture of the new Globe. For instance, speculating about entrances and exits, balcony scenes, or trap door entrances could now be tested in the dynamic spaces of the reconstructed theatre. The results might offer new perspectives on individual scenes or entire plays. The new Globe, far from being an “empty space”—what some have considered the ideal for performance—is actually a prescriptive force. As is true, in fact, of all performance spaces, the new Globe imposes itself on each production. The open-air structure awash in daylight (or, for night performances, in unfocused, blanket light) creates a particular dynamic between the performers and spectators. Much has been said about the yard, open to audience members who wish, or are willing, to stand for a mere £5. Some have argued, as David Wiles does, that “the act of standing creates physiologically energized

---

57 Rylance 175.
spectators,” though it might just as easily create tired audience members. Whatever the outcome, spectators at the Globe often huddle close to the thrust stage, occasionally finding it necessary to shift slightly to avoid an actor’s foot or sword. The space between performer and spectator—at least for the groundlings—is strikingly less than in a typical proscenium theatre. Rylance has noted a number of the effects of this closeness, especially when explaining his thoughts on acting. He described the process of “harnessing [the] intentions and desires” of a character to create a “very lively and flexible play, involving and responding to an audience.” He added, “the audience can see that I am looking directly at them, speaking with them, inciting them to guide me in the drama.” With this intimate, yet open, atmosphere, the question for many scholars and theatre practitioners was how the productions would be received by the public, especially the original-practice productions.

For these Elizabethan-style performances, the goal was never to present definitive, authentic Shakespeare. A large part of the new theatre’s mandate was to experiment with the production conditions of Shakespeare’s time, but in doing so the new Globe also aimed to attract a wide range of audience members, not solely those interested in historical methods of approaching Shakespeare. For example, when designer Jenny Tiramani went to extreme lengths in costuming the actors for the 2003 production of Richard II she maintained that her efforts were always to serve the play

58 Wiles 195.
59 Rylance 171-2.
so that it might be entertaining. Actors wore ‘authentic’ clothing—no zippers or Velcro, for instance—and original fabrics, including velvet purchased “from Zoagli, a town near Genoa famous for its velvet weavers since the sixteenth century.” These details were intended to aid the actors, not inhibit them. Tim Carroll, who directed the production, insisted that “we don’t, of course, pretend that what we are doing is ‘authentic’, partly because the word implies a fatuous value judgment and partly because it is not a claim we could live up to.” Rather, the design details and the architecture of the playing space provided a set of rules within which the actors could work. Rylance played Richard in the all-male production and generally received glowing reviews for his performance, which was anything but stilted or constrained by the original practice conditions. As Richard, he frequently addressed the audience, gaining their sympathy and surprising them with moments of levity and laughter within the play. The original practice “rules,” here and in similar productions, did not distance the audience from the performance. The Globe’s dual tasks of experimentation and accessibility have been met repeatedly, finding success—certainly if success is determined by ticket sales. Critical responses have been more varied, as Paul Prescott has remarked:

---

60 The production of Richard II opened at Middle Temple Hall. The Globe first performed at the historic site in 2002; they staged Twelfth Night for a 400th anniversary of the play, which was originally performed in 1602.

61 Carroll, Tim. Program Notes for Richard II.
While it has long since proved its commercial value (regularly attracting audiences of 90% capacity and upwards), the Globe’s cultural capital remains a subject of debate, a debate that invariably centers on the question of what constitutes Shakespearean authority and authenticity.  

For the task of putting together an acting company, Rylance did not face exactly the same difficulties that Peter Hall had with the RSC in convincing actors to play in Stratford—the Globe was, after all, in London—but Rylance did have to contend with how actors felt about the novelty of the new space. Andrew Gurr described the challenge: “the actors themselves did not know how they were going to relate to [the Globe]. Some actors loved it and some did not, and the ones who loved stayed on and came back.” The Globe, like the RSC, has not been able to maintain a permanent ensemble of actors. A number of performers make frequent appearances and have returned for multiple seasons, including Colin Hurley, Liam Brennan, and Peter Shorey, but the new Globe has to conform to the realities of the acting profession in London, which does not lend itself necessarily to long contracts.

Without a core ensemble, the new Globe might easily be viewed solely as a theatrical space and not as a company with a distinct “style” and function separate from its architecture. Over the course of its brief history, however, certain elements began to emerge that did point to a company identity that was, at least partially,

---

63 Gurr, Interview.
developed by the space of the Globe and its stage. Perhaps ironically, the understanding of a company identity emerged with the experience of touring, of leaving the defining space, as Tim Carroll explained:

I would have said before we toured that you couldn’t really separate the company from the building. But then it became clear as we toured that, in fact, you could. You couldn’t separate us from the idea of the Globe, because what we were touring was, if you like, a kind of exposition of what we’d learned from playing at the Globe.\textsuperscript{64}

This sense that the “findings” from the Globe are transportable and applicable to other spaces is perhaps the theatre’s emerging legacy. With Shakespeare’s Globe having been in operation only for a decade, the theatre’s full measure of success and influence is unknown. Also, how close the design of the new theatre is to the original 1599 Globe is still uncertain, and therefore so is its potential in revealing insight into the meaning of Shakespeare’s plays—assuming, in fact, that their meaning is tied to their original building.

What can be said, though, is that the new Globe has found favor with many spectators and increasingly has become famous around the world as a leader in Shakespearean performance. In addition, the theatre has produced a number of critically acclaimed shows, including the 1999 \textit{Antony and Cleopatra}, the 2000 \textit{Hamlet}, and the 2002 \textit{Twelfth Night} (for which Mark Rylance won the Olivier Critics Award for his portrayal of Olivia). Often, though, critics give credit to the actors and directors and not necessarily to the characteristics of the theatre building and playing

\textsuperscript{64} Carroll, Interview.
conditions. The underlying implication has been that actors, such as Rylance, were good in spite of the fact that, for example, they were wearing “authentic” Elizabethan clothing.

In 2006, Dominic Dromgoole took over from Mark Rylance as artistic director. A director by trade, not an actor like Rylance, Dromgoole moved away from original-practice productions in his first season, leaving some people to question whether the new Globe is being used for its “intended” purpose. For the 2007 season, however, Dromgoole explored new approaches to capturing Shakespeare’s legacy. In the tradition of the 1599 Globe, the new theatre sent a traveling company of actors around the U.K in a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. According to the marketing for the tour, the Globe company wanted to “emulat[e] the experience of Elizabethan players, taking all the equipment they need and adapting the play to a wealth of glorious venues.” The new Globe hoped that “the arrival of the players [would] recreate the excitement and vivacity of an Elizabethan travelling performance.”

Whatever the new Globe’s future, the theatre has surprised many practitioners and audience members in terms of the liveliness of the space. Certainly, not everyone is enthusiastic about it. When actor Sam West was approached as a possible replacement for the position of artistic director, he quipped that he would take the job only if he could “knock down the pillars, put a roof on it, and paint it grey.”

---

66 West, Sam. Interview. 23 August 2006.
whether people like the new Globe or not, they cannot ignore its popular success. How exactly its presence has influenced the RSC and the larger theatre world is yet to be determined.

**Case Study: Measure for Measure**

In 2004, as part of its season of *Star-Crossed Lovers*, Shakespeare’s Globe staged an original practices production of *Measure for Measure*. The play ran at the Globe from mid June through the end of October, and then toured in the United States the following year, in 2005-06. At the new Globe, original practices were observed except in the case of casting: a woman, the acclaimed actress Sophie Thompson, played Isabella. On tour, however, the company shifted to an all-male cast, with Edward Hogg in the lead female role. The tour was touted as artistic director Mark Rylance’s farewell to the Globe; his tenure would end with the journey across America.

In the production—at the Globe and on tour—Rylance played the lead part of Duke Vincentio, a role often noted by theatre practitioners and scholars as being especially ambiguous. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries many people have considered *Measure for Measure* a “problem play,” and the duke’s actions are generally acknowledged as some of the more confusing aspects of the play. His motivations for secrecy and for manipulating various characters have long troubled theatre practitioners, scholars, critics, and audiences alike. Directors and performers
often strive to determine the causes behind the duke’s actions, sometimes inventing catalysts to explain his behavior. In doing so, director’s concepts or actor’s interpretations of the duke sometimes set the tone of a particular production.

Rylance, John Dove, the Master of Play, and Jennifer Tiramani, the Master of clothing, properties and hangings, chose to accept the duke’s actions rather than to analyze and explain them. They approached *Measure for Measure* not as a problem play but, as Rylance explained, as a comedy. For Rylance, the term comedy applies to the play in the way that Shakespeare intended it: “in the classical sense. All of [Shakespeare’s] plays have laughs—the tragedies and the comedies—I’m not talking about laughs, I’m talking about unity [and] harmony being resonant at the end, compared to tragedy, which ends in disintegration.”67 This definition, Rylance believes, was Shakespeare’s own understanding of *Measure for Measure*.68 And modern productions, he argues, have largely forgotten or neglected the Bard’s “original” viewpoint. Rylance defends his position on the play by noting other Shakespearean comedies that are no less “problematic” than *Measure for Measure*, but that notably do not fall into the modern category of “problem play.” Rylance cites Rosalind’s deception of Orlando in *As You Like It* and Viola’s deception of Orsino in *Twelfth Night* as examples. The Duke’s deception of Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, Rylance claims, is on par with these other characters’ behavior. Yet *As You Like It* and

---

68 The notion that all is unified and harmonious at the end of *Measure for Measure* is debatable. Scholars often point to Isabella’s silence to the duke’s marriage proposal at the end of the play as an indication that all is not, in fact, neatly tied up.
Twelfth Night do not seem to bother scholars and directors as much as Measure for Measure does: “I really feel adamantly that [calling Measure for Measure a problem play] is a corruption of the play. . . It’s called a comedy and it’s no more problematic than any other of the comedies.” Rylance believes that this inconsistency will seem odd to future generations in much the same way that twenty-first-century theatre scholars seek to understand eighteenth and nineteenth-century manipulations of Shakespeare’s plays in production. He asserts:

“I think in 200 years people will look back on our time and laugh at the scholastic and directorial insistence that we turn the comedies into tragedies and that we twist them because of conceptual and intellectual ideas. I see it very clearly now and the globe has taught me this, and I’m really grateful for it.”

Rylance’s reaction to the way Measure for Measure has been categorized reveals more than simple theoretical disagreements with established literary criticism and with many recent stagings of the play. His opinion, he contends, is developed from special knowledge gained from playing inside the reconstructed Globe and, even to some degree, from playing on the hallowed ground of Southwark. The Globe, he states directly, has taught him how to understand the play, in its original generic traits, and how to perform it, in its spatial dimensions. In this sense, then, the production serves as an epitome of production at Shakespeare’s Glob.. The implication is that the theatre space and significant geographical location provide the practitioner with authority in interpreting the plays. According to this line of reasoning, the new Globe

---

69 Rylance, Globelink interview.
70 Rylance, Globelink interview.
Company asserts that it can do more than simply stage the plays; the company, in conjunction with the theatre space, implicitly claims that it can unlock the original meaning and intention of Shakespeare’s works.

The 2004 production of Measure for Measure can be viewed as a product of the Globe’s dual mandates of tradition and innovation. As envisioned by Sam Wanamaker and largely carried out by Mark Rylance, the Globe Theatre introduced architectural and artistic perimeters for approaching Shakespeare’s plays, particularly when using original practice methods, but always to serve the plays in the present. As Tim Carroll explains, the company decided to enforce “the strict set of rules of the Elizabethan world and see what happens if we abide by them.” In this sense, the Globe is also remarkably innovative. Carroll adds, “there’s no way that you can call [original practices] traditional. People say, ‘oh you do it traditionally, don’t you?’ and I say ‘no, there’s no tradition in this country of original practice. None at all.’”

The decision to approach Measure for Measure as a straightforward comedy and work within the bounds of what “would have been possible in the 1599 Globe,” resulted in a “new” interpretation of the play.

In this way, Wanamaker and Rylance maintained aspirations similar to those of the RSC, at least at the Stratford company’s inception under Peter Hall. For theatrical productions, the geographic location of Southwark worked for Rylance in much the same way as Stratford had for Hall. The locations provided deep ties to the past and to

---

71 Carroll, interview.
Shakespeare’s legacy, and yet Stratford and Southwark were taken up by men who wished to explore the plays for the present. Hall fought against Stratford’s heritage industry in terms of how it might encroach on the artistic merit of the RSC, but he embraced Stratford’s actual connection to the Bard. Rylance did not have to contend with an existing Shakespeare industry in Southwark so much, but he did have to negotiate the heritage and veneration tendencies developing in the area alongside the artistic and scholarly goals for the new Globe. Measure for Measure serves as an example of Rylance’s ability to balance the double aims of the Globe of celebrating the past—the “original”—with making viable, interesting theatre for the present. His duke, though dressed in pristine doublet and hose and in a ruff collar that had to be hand-pressed around a hot iron rod, was nonetheless completely connected to the twenty-first century audience surrounding him on three sides of the stage. Rylance frequently directed lines to individuals in the audience. He even picked out a wife for Lucio from among the audience, pointing and referring to her in his exchanges with the other actors.

Rylance yielded to what he believed Shakespeare and Shakespeare’s theatre provided in terms of clues about Measure for Measure, but ultimately, he and the rest of the cast had to decipher and interpret the information they discovered. “I love interpretation, I don’t mind that,” Rylance claims, and then adds, “but I think . . . we really owe it to [Shakespeare] to pay a little more attention to some of the obvious
things he says."  

In alluding to what Shakespeare “said,” Rylance seems to mean not only that *Measure for Measure* was listed in the first folio as a comedy (which does not necessarily mean that Shakespeare himself labeled it such), but also that the play’s text and its original playing space instruct future generations more than do centuries of literary study.

Some of Rylance’s remarks were likely only veiled defenses against the critical reception to the production. The 2004 London production received mixed reviews, often comparing it to another high-profile staging of the play running concurrently at the National, Complicite’s *Measure for Measure*. Lyn Gardner of *The Guardian*, for instance, dismissed the Globe’s production as “some sort of light-hearted comic romp.” By comparison, Complicite’s version was hailed by a number of London critics as bold and psychologically insightful. The look and tone of Complicite’s production was strikingly different from the Globe’s. The stage was full of “surveillance screens, police brutality, rigged trials, and the echoing clang of prison doors,” and the tone remained “uniformly somber.” Complicite, a highly-acclaimed company known for productions that feature striking visual effects and inventive approaches to storytelling, concentrated on the contemporary parallels within *Measure for Measure* and placed the play’s themes of corrupt power and sexual desire in the context of contemporary politics. Not surprisingly, then, the production did not highlight the comedic aspect of the play.

---

72 Rylance, Globelink interview.
73 Conkie 236.
Nor did the production, in the manner of Rylance’s production, seek to discover how the text and the original playing space inform performers of certain definitive, if not intrinsic, traits that derived from the imagination of the playwright and players. The Complicite production tells us much about staging methods and political ideas today; the Shakespeare’s Globe production tried to tell us important things about the play that are not immediately contemporary. It delivered past and present simultaneously, and in that may have been more adventurous—or at least fresher—because it located us in two spaces, two world: Shakespeare’s and ours. In attempting to serve the space of the Globe, the production created spatial dimensions for the spectators’ imaginations.

On tour, the Globe Company received more positive responses. As had been the case throughout Rylance’s tenure, Americans were quicker with praise than the British had been. The New York Times critic Charles Isherwood noted that the “joyous surprise of [the Globe’s Measure for Measure] . . . is how it floods this famously dark play with continuously roaming beams of comic light.”

Touring Measure for Measure forced the Globe Company to define itself outside of the walls of the Globe theatre. The dual mandates of Wanamaker’s vision of tradition and innovation could be seen in the company’s decision to tour an all-male cast. This choice pushed the original practices approach one step further, making the production seem more “authentic”—more traditional in terms of the way the play

---

would have originally been performed—but the result for American audiences was something new and innovative. The company was touring its special insight gathered from having played in the original space and location. For audiences, the production looked markedly different from most director and designer-driven productions typical in the US.

The guiding principles for the company on tour were rooted in one of the foundational missions of the new Globe—to explore the Elizabethan approach to theatre. Tim Carroll explained that the company’s search for venues in the US was initially plagued with concerns about finding spaces similar enough to the Globe or to Middle Temple Hall. He recounted:

But then the more we [looked], the more frustrated we became and the more we thought maybe we were being a bit precious. Maybe the really Elizabethan thing to do, which we should buy into is say, well, we can put up our stage anywhere. When the theatres were closed for plague . . . they went on tour and they just played in the upper room of a pub or in the dining hall of a college or courtyard or whatever.\(^76\)

The Globe Company chose established theatres in the US such as the Guthrie in Minneapolis and the Annenberg Center in Philadelphia, not pubs and courtyards, but the company attempted to fill these impressive spaces with the spirit of the Globe. Audiences entered the playing spaces and found the actors already on stage, milling about, putting final touches on make-up and wigs. The actors acknowledged the audience, nodding hellos to individuals. Peter Shorey, playing Mistress Overdone, flirted a bit with the men in the front row. These pre-show actions effectively warmed-

\(^76\) Carroll, interview.
up the audience for the more interactive style of the Globe Company. Lighting was kept simple and general, and even spread a bit over the audience to soften the divide between players and spectator. Rylance’s duke, while thoroughly engaged in the onstage action, always kept an awareness of the audiences’ responses, subtlety inviting them to laugh or cringe at various moments. What audiences received, and seemed to appreciate, was the new experience of having Shakespeare performed in such an interactive way. Far from being old-fashioned and alienating, the Globe Company carried the energy of the “original” playing space to make the play seem almost new. As Charles Isherwood noted, “the gags [felt] freshly scribbled.’’

To many, the ability to make Shakespeare’s plays feel new has been one of the surprising triumphs of the Globe Theatre. The special nature of the theatre space and its sacred location have provided the company with the means to explore the plays for the twenty-first century.

---

Isherwood, Charles. “Putting a Bit ‘o Bounce in the Dark Comedy.”
CONCLUSION

Due to the fact that the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare’s Globe share the distinction of being located in historically significant places, drawing comparisons between the two companies, and more specifically between their reactions to their homes, reveals fundamental aspects about their separate missions and identities. Nonetheless, comparisons and connections must first take into account the inherent differences between the companies and their locations. Not only do the histories and structures of the RSC and the new Globe vary greatly (the Shakespeare Memorial Festival, of course, figures heavily in the former’s history), Stratford-upon-Avon and Southwark provide distinct geographic palimpsests for the two companies; what occurred at each site was independent from the other and, therefore, over the courses of their histories, the companies have reacted to the individual circumstances of each place. For instance, Stratford as birthplace and burial place initially invoked and suggested memorializing activity seen in the activities of Memorial Festival, whereas Southwark as workplace encouraged a search for the original playing space and performance conditions. Nonetheless, both locations force the companies to
contend with issues of authenticity and authority. By virtue of being in the “right” places, the RSC and the new Globe inherited the cultural prominence that has allowed them to speak for Shakespeare.

As passion for Shakespeare’s work has developed over the years into devotion for the man himself, his places have become sacred. Broadly defined, sacred space refers to, as Chris C. Park asserts, “that portion of the earth’s surface which is recognized by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty or esteem.” He adds that “sacred space does not naturally exist, but is assigned sanctity as man defines, limits, and characterizes it through his culture, experience, and goals.”

Moreover, scholar J.E. Malpas describes the tendency to connect human identity with human location—that somehow the two are “inseparably bound.” Stratford and Southwark stand as definitive examples of this tendency. Getting close, physically, to the places of significance in Shakespeare’s life does seem for many people to offer a way to an “authentic” Shakespeare—a pursuit that has driven Bardolatry over the centuries. In some measure, the sacred spaced justifies the search, if not the realization always, of an ‘authentic’ experience which derives from being in the special place.

The effort to find Shakespeare is perhaps futile and foolhardy, though at the root of the search can be found a more objective pursuit. Crime scene investigations involving forensic science, for example, can prove useful in determining what happened at a specific site. DNA particles, fingerprints, and marks left on furniture,

---

2 Malpas, J. E. *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 2
walls, and floors often provide information for investigators. Archaeology serves this same purpose for the historian. For instance, hazelnut shells discovered at the site of the Rose theatre tell historians what materials builders might have used to secure the mortar of the flooring. Discovering the land and, more precisely, the exact spot where Shakespeare was born or for which he wrote the plays sheds light on his world.

The banks of the Avon and the Thames where Shakespeare likely walked lend their geographic locations historical weight. Why people come and how they experience the locations are dependent upon factors ranging from their interest in and knowledge of Shakespeare to their own beliefs about the sacred. The reverential “oohs” and “ahs” occasionally voiced by tourists who enter Shakespeare’s Birthplace in Stratford or the Rose site in Southwark, for instance, are largely emotional and psychological responses to an environment loaded with cultural significance—assigned by historians, performers, enthusiasts, and travelers.

Given the distinguishing factor of sacred space, the RSC and the new Globe share more than critics and scholars have yet fully discussed. Comparing the two companies seems to imply that they are in direct competition with one another. Practitioners and scholars are divided on this issue. Director Tim Carroll insists that “there hasn’t been any antagonism really between the two companies, except in so far as any company doing Shakespeare and getting praised is taking a bit of focus away from the RSC.” Certainly, the two companies’ missions are quite distinct, and there is little doubt that the Shakespeare industry can support both—as the evidence thus far
demonstrates. What can be said, then, about the relationship between the RSC and the new Globe? Andrew Gurr maintained that “there is a dynamic between the Globe and the RSC—going both ways.” He admitted that “people are cautious to talk about it,” though he emphasized that it is “not as simple as the Globe damaging the RSC.” In 2007, Mark Rylance went further, stating that “It would be nice if [the RSC] acknowledged that we [the Globe] had a massive effect on them.”

A number of specific questions emerge from these varied comments: for example, has the popular success of Shakespeare’s Globe influenced the RSC’s decisions to abandon aspirations for a permanent home in the capital? Was the RSC’s Complete Works Festival an attempt to reaffirm, in light of the Globe’s presence, the company’s place as the world leader in Shakespearean performance? Has the architecture of the new Globe affected the design choices for the new Royal Shakespeare Theatre?

For decades the RSC’s authority in Shakespeare performance was unquestioned. Hundreds of other theatre companies regularly performed the Bard’s plays, but even the more prominent ones did not reach the level of acclaim and world renown of the RSC. The company that Peter Hall founded in the early sixties transformed the way people approached the plays. The productions were innovative and challenging. They often reassessed traditional readings of Shakespeare’s plays to speak to current events, as the company attempted to define itself as a national authority.

---

3 Gurr, Andrew. Interview. 21 August 2006.
institutions. In addition, a whole generation of now-iconic actors, including Judi Dench, Ian McKellen, Ben Kingsley, and Patrick Stewart, emerged from the ranks of the RSC. With its emphasis on the plays—their language and their relevance to contemporary audiences—the RSC seemed for many people to hold the key to the Shakespeare’s true intentions.

Through its success, the company also deeply affected Stratford. The RSC’s initial rejection of the commemorative industry in the town broke the connection between veneration and performance. The relationship between company and birthplace eventually settled into an uneasy, but positive co-existence as Stratford has developed into a pre-eminent Shakespeare educational center and a celebrated—even sacred—performance site.

Nonetheless, for decades the company struggled with finding suitable theatre spaces. Peter Brook summarized the problems that the RSC faced in describing the inherent difficulties of building a good theatre:

I have had many abortive discussions with architects building new theatres—trying vainly to find words with which to communicate my own conviction that it is not a question of good buildings and bad: a beautiful place may never bring about explosion of life: this is the mystery of the theatre, but in the understanding of this mystery lies the only possibility of ordering it into a science. In [most] forms of architecture there is a relationship between conscious, articulate design and good functioning: a well-designed hospital may be more efficacious than a higgledy-piggledy one; but as for theatres, the
problem of design cannot start logically. . . The science of theatre-building
must come from studying what it is that brings about the most vivid
relationship between people.\(^5\)

The RSC’s Swan Theatre succeeded in this regard and the proposed design of the new
Royal Shakespeare Theatre is intended to as well.

The new Globe, by contrast, found this “vivid relationship” immediately. In
trying to build a meticulous replica of the 1599 Globe, Sam Wanamaker and his team
managed to create a dynamic performance space. Even some harsh critics of the new
Globe concede that the space, whether “accurate” or not, is surprisingly alive.

Before the opening of the new Globe, the capital did not provide a single,
widely visited destination “solely dedicated to commemorating Shakespeare or
Shakespeare’s theatre.”\(^6\) The combination of the memorializing aspect of the new
Globe with its performance energy has made it a formidable player on the
contemporary Shakespeare scene. The company implicitly challenges a number of the
factors that once distinguished the RSC. No longer, for example, is the RSC’s
Stratford education center the undisputed source for the study of Shakespearean
performance, as Trevor Nunn asserted confidently in the mid-1980s. Now, the Globe’s
education center is a major resource, as well as a large component of the new theatre’s
mission to explore the Elizabethan approach to theatre. Most importantly, the RSC is

\(^5\) Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. N.Y.: Atheneum, 1968. 65
\(^6\) Schmitz, Johanna. “Location as a Monumentalizing Factor at Original and Reconstructed
Shakespearean Theatres.” *Elizabethan Performance in North American Spaces*. Theatre Symposium
no longer alone in claiming Shakespeare’s discernable and material legacy. In fact, the new Globe is situated in a more relevant location in terms of the reasons the bard is venerated at all.

A few critics and scholars have asked what effect the new theatre will have on performance trends. Robert Smallwood’s musing reflects his negative opinion of the Globe, but his acknowledgement of the potential for influence is nonetheless telling:

What effect the arrival of the Globe will have on the styles of playing in other Shakespearean theatres, and whether, indeed, its propensity to pander to the lowest common denominator of taste in its audiences is a passing phase or an incurable malady, it is too early to say.”

And even actor Sam West, who dismissed the building and wished to paint it grey, has acknowledged that it “would be strange if the Globe has not influenced the RSC.” He added that the new theatre’s most obvious impact was its “great strength” of making “an arguable case for Shakespeare not needing scenery.”

The future paths of both companies will reveal more in time. For now, they both offer separate attempts to reach ultimately the same goal—to stage the best, most entertaining, and most interesting productions they can. Their locations and theatres too provide Shakespeare-enthusiasts the often sought-after experience of communion with the past. Much like the act of attending a play, the act of visiting a special place asks the participant to engage their imagination.

---


8 West, Interview.
Commenting on the proliferation of Shakespearean lore and relics he discovered during his visit to Stratford-upon-Avon, Washington Irving offered the following advice: “I am ever willing to be deceived, where the deceit is pleasant, and costs nothing. I am therefore a ready believer in relics, legends, and local anecdotes of goblins and great men; and would advise all travelers who travel for their gratification to be the same.” As the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare’s Globe have demonstrated, the fascination generated by Shakespeare’s own ability to spin tales and “deceive” finds added force in Stratford and Southwark.

---


Carroll, Tim. *Interview with Author*. 16 August 2006.


Gurr, Andrew. Interview with Author. 21 August 2006.


Royal Shakespeare Company Website <http://www.rsc.org.uk/>


West, Sam. *Interview with Author*. 29 August 2006.

