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PART ONE

PAST AND PRESENT

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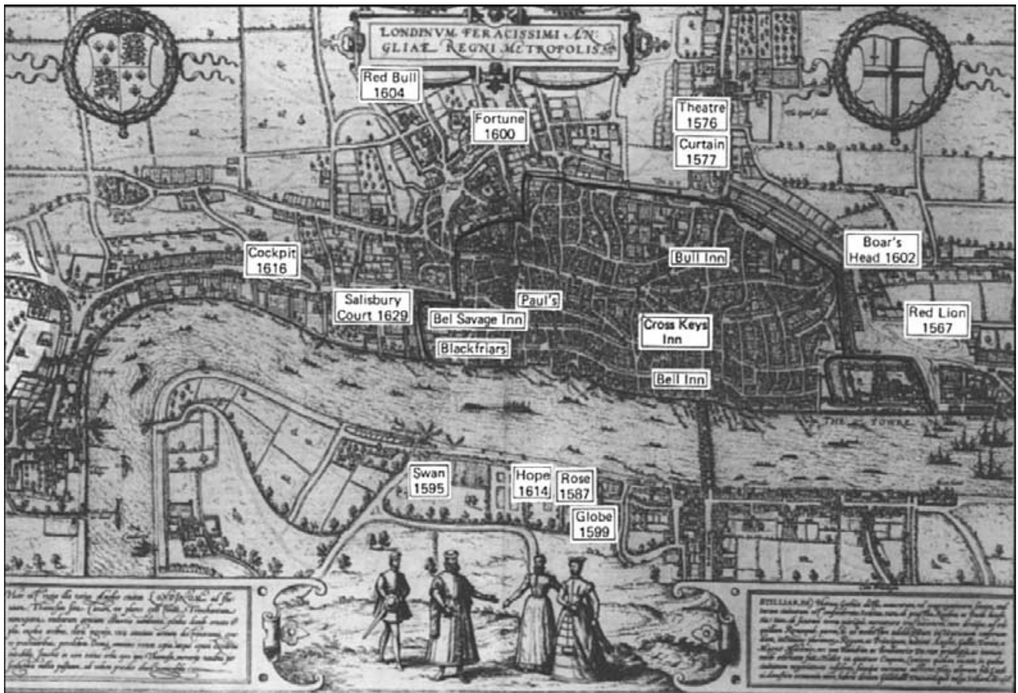

Fig. 1 The location of the London playhouses shown on a contemporary map

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THE ONCE AND FUTURE GLOBE

Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring

THE TITLE OF the present book, *Shakespeare's Globe Rebuilt*, is in various ways misleading. The playhouse to which it refers is not *Shakespeare's* Globe. The Elizabethan Shakespeare contributed no more than one element to a collaborative enterprise which took in business interests and performance and organisational skills without which his abounding genius could not have found expression. He was not the owner of the Globe, though he shared in its ownership.[1] His plays were not, all of them, written for the Globe, though from 1599 to 1613, the years of the first playhouse of that name, he had something of the character of resident playwright with the company who performed there. Nor has the original Globe been rebuilt. *Shakespeare's Globe Rebuilt* stands as the title for and expression of an unattainable ideal. As a book it is the record of many years of the most committed academic and practical scholarship which, despite its scruple, knowledge and industry, has had to resort in matters large and small to inference and compromise, in order to ensure the construction of the playhouse which now stands in Southwark. No-one writing here, and no-one associated with the large-scale enterprise that has grown from Sam Wanamaker's passionate advocacy, will contend otherwise.

No doubt the designation of the new playhouse and indeed the whole enterprise it represents and has spawned (including this book) derive from and are dependent upon the cultural authority, the financial leverage and the world-wide currency of Shakespeare's name. In that sense, at least, the building and its activities may truly be labelled Shakespeare's Globe. It is also the case that the Elizabethan Globe depended in large measure for its commercial survival and success on plays of Shakespeare's authorship. Of the twenty-nine extant plays confidently thought to have been written for the Globe up to 1608, fifteen are Shakespeare's, and a further six of those performed there (over and above the twenty-nine) were revivals of Shakespeare pieces written before 1599. Other plays that have not come down to us were certainly performed at the Globe, and the more of these there were, the more Shakespeare's proportionate contribution shrinks. Nevertheless, it must remain an overwhelmingly significant one. In this respect too, therefore, the naming of Shakespeare's Globe is apt. Yet the tension between Shakespeare's role in the Globe's Elizabethan success and his role at the new Globe remains an acute one, even if the tension is concealed by the use of the same name for both. Shakespeare then is not Shakespeare now. Going to the Globe is bound to be for its modern audience an exercise in double vision, present and past.

The Elizabethan theatre-scene to which Shakespeare contributed was a crowded one, even if the City and sometimes the Court attempted through pressure, censorship and

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legislation to limit its extent and its influence.[2] It has been calculated that, at a conservative estimate, two thousand plays were written and performed in the period between 1590 and 1642.[3] In the absence of other public voices – the pulpit and the book were the only competing media – the playhouse took on the role of shaping and moving people's minds in a way only faintly echoed by theatre today. But the voracious appetite of the playhouses, comparable to that of television now, was stimulated much less by thoughts of political and social influence than by commercial hopes and fears, as documents gathered at the end of this book confirm. Theatre and theatre buildings were business, and politics and creative genius had to make their way through channels opened up by financial success. The playhouses, including the Globe, had to appeal to their audiences and had to accommodate them in a manner likely to attract them to come again. For the modern playgoer, aspects of the rebuilt Globe will seem, certainly at first, *un*attractive. The open air yard at the heart of the building will not strike today's audiences as providing the ideal circumstances for watching theatre, though until very recently football crowds would have thought it odd to watch that particular sport under cover. The analogy is not an idle one, for something of the same blend of commerce and entertainment relates to both activities. The fact that one of the early theatres (the Hope) doubled as a bear-baiting arena only confirms the parallel, at least through the shared practices and habits-of-mind of competitive sport. The *absences* of the rebuilt auditorium will also strike most spectators as odd: no stage lighting, no sound system, no setting (or very little). The decoration of the playhouse, which many will find over-elaborate and even gaudy, accords with Elizabethan taste and visual habits rather than modern, and will be a constant reminder of the cultural otherness of the plays performed within it. Indeed, almost every aspect of the rebuilt playhouse will speak boldly of the distance between today's theatre and the theatre of Elizabethan London. This will be true whether we are talking about the seating arrangements or about the place held by theatre in the communal life of the day. The question to be addressed is whether, despite this distance, the plays performed at the new Globe will make themselves heard in our time. Or, a more ambitious aim, whether they will speak even louder because the circumstances of their performance, in so far as these circumstances can be recreated, accord with the writing practices and performance assumptions of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. It is this latter aim that has implicitly animated the quest for authentic reconstruction, and has driven so much scholarship and so much practical research and experiment towards the goal of the rebuilt Globe.

It is sometimes thought that the Globe typifies the theatre spaces of Shakespeare's England. Recent research has demonstrated what should have been understood as a truism, namely that even among the arena theatre-type to which the Globe belongs there was in reality wide variation in size and structural arrangements. Archaeological investigation of the Rose, the Globe's near neighbour, shows not only that the playhouse was much smaller than we believe the Globe to have been, but that it was adapted in the course of its life in regard both to stage configuration and audience capacity. (*See* the chapter by Simon Blatherwick *below*.) The Swan, another example of the same theatre-type, and the only one for which we have a contemporary sketch of the interior (*see* fig. 5, p. 29) apparently had a quite different 'heavens' (or stage-cover), and possibly different entrance and exit arrangements than we believe was the case at the Globe. Some of the theatres had no stage-cover at all. These are important matters, so far as performance conditions are concerned, and there

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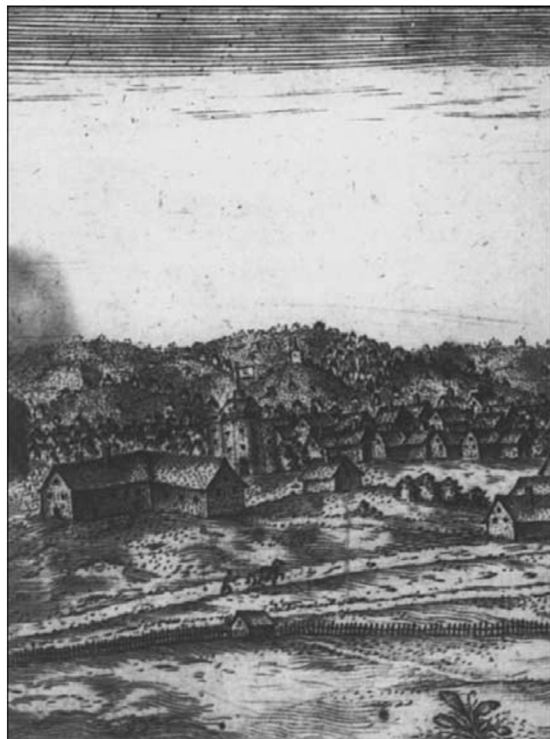

FIG. 2 *The View of the Cittye of London from the North towards the Sowth* (>1599), detail showing the Theatre

are others, such as the extent, height and shape of the stage, the position of the stage-pillars – where they existed – and the carpentry and decoration of the *scenae frons* (or scenic wall) that must have differed, perhaps widely, from playhouse to playhouse. The question that arises is the justification for rebuilding the Globe to such exacting standards of accuracy (wherever possible) when other playing places used by Shakespeare and his fellows were different in so many respects. The question is made more acute by evidence that Shakespeare's company, the Chamberlain's Men, would have strongly preferred to move to the indoor Blackfriars theatre when they were forced by opposition from neighbours of the Blackfriars to abandon that plan and make the move across the Thames to the Globe.[4] The Inigo Jones theatre in the current Globe development takes its origin in part from the acknowledgment that an indoor space, built in the seventeenth-century way, also affords playing conditions appropriate to the presentation of Shakespeare's work and that of his contemporaries. Yet the fact is that a major part of the Shakespearean repertory was written for the original Globe, even if through what seems almost an historical accident. The re-creation of its playing conditions, as closely as evidence and modern regulations allow, offers us the only defensible path in the rebuilding experiment. Once swerve from the aim of exactness and authenticity and the result will be compromise, muddle and mish-mash. The Globe was the playhouse for which Shakespeare imagined some of his greatest plays, and its rebuilding affords the opportunity to situate them once more in conditions (spatial, visual and acoustic) akin to those he held in his mind's eye while writing.

The Globe stands at a crucial turning point in the history of Elizabethan playhouse-building. It also sums up in its fabric the past of playhouse construction and forecasts the

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future. As the successor of the playhouse called the Theatre, making use of timbers from that building, the Globe can be thought of as drawing into itself the essential features of playhouse construction, almost from the first experiments in that building type (fig. 1). As the playhouse that deeply influenced the design of the Fortune, built in 1600 (*see* the chapter by John Orrell below, especially pp. 52–3, and the Fortune contract reprinted among the documents at the end of this book), the Globe can be considered to look equally towards the future. So in this perspective also, the Globe serves as the appropriate playhouse to rebuild as a representative Elizabethan theatre-space. It can in addition serve as the appropriate expression of the success, commercial and artistic, of the playhouses of the period. As 'the symbol of an entire art', in Bernard Beckerman's words, the construction of the Globe 'initiated a glorious decade during which the company achieved a level of stability and a quality of productivity rarely matched in the history of theater.'[5] The years immediately preceding and following its opening, from 1595 to 1604, were marked, as Andrew Gurr has noted, by an oversupply of the type of amphitheatre playhouse to which the Globe belonged.[6] James Burbage had already refurbished the Theatre, and Henslowe enlarged the Rose (in 1592), while new playhouses were now being built (or in the case of the Globe *rebuilt*) in what for the period were remarkable numbers: the Swan (1595), the Globe (1599), the Fortune (1600), the Boar's Head (1599; 1600) and the Red Bull (by 1604). In the competitive circumstances thus created, only the Globe, the Fortune and the downmarket Red Bull were genuine successes. Once again, given the achievement of its greatest playwright, and what we must infer was the excellence of its acting company, the Globe offers itself as the theatre to reconstruct in our time.

A glance at the map of Elizabethan London (fig. 2) shows the amphitheatre playhouses (in contrast to the city inns and the indoor playhouses) distributed around the periphery of the city, outside the city walls. The establishment of the Globe on Bankside, to the south of the river, confirmed the playhouse-builders' recognition that, whatever their wishes might be for social advancement, and for a more socially-elevated locality for their playhouse, current political conditions and public opinion would not easily allow it. The first playhouses were built to the north and east of the city, outside city jurisdiction. The subsequent cluster of amphitheatres on Bankside, also outside the city's writ, reinforced what was already an entertainment ghetto of considerable extent. Animal baiting and other bloodsports joined in this area with brothels to give the place a feisty reputation (fig. 3). As Roy Porter notes, on Bankside, in the borough of Southwark, 'disorderly behaviour, if not exactly licensed, was borne with a certain resignation', though that resignation did not extend to tolerance, since the area hosted no fewer than five prisons.[7] It was also a place of inns and hostelries, being the area where the roads to and from Sussex, Surrey and Kent came together and an area of workshops, tanneries, soapyards, breweries and lumber yards. Altogether, Bankside and Southwark were known as a bustling unfashionable locality, and the site of activities of which modern residents might not be entirely proud. It was also the home of a noteworthy artistic community.[8] While we cannot know in any detail the composition of the Elizabethan Globe's audience, and while some, including many of the socially better elements, will certainly have come from across the Thames – to the profit of the watermen – many of the spectators must have felt that in attending the Globe they were engaging in an activity which if not exactly *risque* was certainly not a manifestation of

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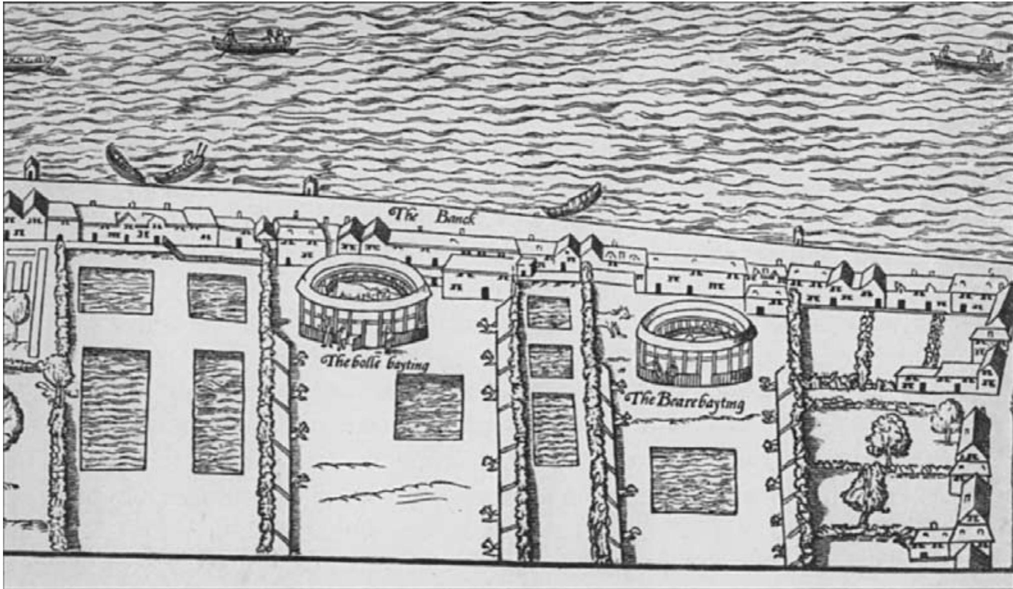

FIG. 3 *Civitas Londinium* (the so-called 'Agas' map), detail of Bankside prior to the building of the Globe

unalloyed high culture, in the way that attendance at mainstream theatre is understood today. Much has recently been made of the topographically marginal placing of Elizabethan playhouses, as an index of their socio-political marginality and potential for subversion, in the minds of London audiences if not more widely. It is an easy matter to exaggerate, and exaggeration has not always been resisted. Yet this is undoubtedly one aspect of the cultural role of the Elizabethan Globe which the rebuilt theatre will not be able to replicate. The new theatre will have attached to it assumptions placing it within educational and tourist agendas at variance with those of its Elizabethan predecessor. Such agendas will have to be embraced, or submerged, by the professional excellence of the performances if the new Globe is to thrive. Perhaps it is some comfort that even today Southwark retains memories of its sturdy unfashionableness, too far along the South Bank from the Festival Hall and the National Theatre to figure as part of London's culture industry. How long it will retain this unprivileged position, given the development of the Bankside Tate, the Thames pedestrian walkway and the proposed footbridge across the river, is a matter for speculation. So far as tourist interest is concerned, a wiredrawn comfort might be that almost all the descriptions we have of Elizabethan playhouses were penned by visiting foreigners. Even in Shakespeare's day the London playhouses figured as a tourist attraction.

The busyness of the Elizabethan theatre spilled over into performance spaces well beyond the amphitheatre playhouses such as the Globe, or indoor playhouses like the Blackfriars. When the earliest amphitheatres (the Red Lion, 1567, and the Theatre, 1576) were brought into use, professional playing was already a long-established craft employing a multiplicity of performance venues. College halls and the communal rooms of great houses, city inns (the Cross Keys and the Bel Savage for example) and the lawyers' Inns of Court (Gray's Inn for instance and the Middle Temple), churches, guildhalls, streets and market places and many more were all pressed into service. After the new amphitheatres were available, the

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overspill continued, with performances taking place in all of the public venues just summarised (except for the city inns, where playing was stopped after 1595) as well as in more settled circumstances during command performances at Court (a recognition vital to the prestige even more than the financial well-being of the companies), and on tour. It is often forgotten that the Elizabethan companies, including those with which Shakespeare was associated, spent long periods on the road, driven out of their London venues by plague – the theatres were closed when plague deaths reached forty per week – or by restraints on playing of one sort or another. Touring on the European mainland, even, was far from unknown among professional players of the period, including some of the most successful, and involving at least a splinter group from a company as celebrated as the Lord Admiral's.[9] Adaptability to varying performance spaces must have been the hallmark of the Elizabethan actor, and the Elizabethan script. If we are to understand the performance opportunities offered by rebuilding the Globe we must do so while recognising the readiness of the Elizabethan actor to devise ways of turning to account the facilities, and the absences, of the playhouse, in a manner learned from touring to diverse and often highly informal venues. Too strict an accounting of the features of the playhouse will result only in a failure to recognise the actor's improvisational skills, now as well as then. Undoubtedly a performance lexicon responding to the architecture of stage and auditorium must have built up at the original Globe, in the context of the remarkably stable acting company that played it. It may be possible to re-invent the terms of this lexicon, or translate them into other terms, if the rebuilt Globe can attract and retain a company as talented and unchanging as the company for which Shakespeare wrote, and within which he worked.[10] This is not just a matter of company 'style', though the conventions and abbreviations gestured towards in that term are a part of what we mean. This style, together with the recognition of individual actors and individual skills, will play a part in giving solidity to the new venture, as they must have done to the original one, as hints in Shakespeare's scripts and the scripts of other playwrights suggest.

Today's audience will, it is true, make the achievement of such a goal difficult. The expected international and tourist elements of the audience will tell against continuity and recognition, though it may be hoped that a core of playgoers within reasonable travel distance will begin to learn what the Globe and its company have to tell us about early plays (and perhaps more recent). What is less open to dispute is that today's actors are equipped, by experience and inclination, to discover what the distinctive playing conditions of the Globe have to offer in giving voice to the plays performed there. It is more than a hundred years since actors began to experiment with theatre space as an element in the animation of scripts, on the European mainland in Antoine's *Théâtre Libre*, for instance, or in the work of Reinhardt or Jarry, as well as, partly in imitation, in England. Even more, the last forty years have seen in Britain a multitude of explorations of theatre venues from the smallest basement or pub theatre through studios and courtyard playhouses to found spaces and outdoor installations. And all this in addition to the construction of more established venues which have contributed to the overthrow of the proscenium arch, such as the Manchester Royal Exchange or, in a different sense, the Olivier (at the National Theatre) or the Stratford-on-Avon Swan.[11] Actors are nowadays fully accustomed to responding to the language of theatre space as an essential element in their performance vocabulary. It might indeed be argued,

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without serious overstatement, that today's actors belong to the first generation equipped with the improvisatory skills, in relation to space, of their Elizabethan precursors, even if the dominance of film and television have unfitted some for the outgoing performance-techniques demanded by an auditorium as large as the Globe. The discoveries of the workshop and prologue seasons in the unfinished playhouse have at least given cause to hope that the rich possibilities of the space will be opened up when a resident company has in due time explored them fully and incorporated them into their playing.

If we were to ask what further potentialities the new Globe will offer for re-discovery, the most evident must be a stage-audience relationship conditioned by both proximity and distance. Referring to the Royal Shakespeare Company's Swan Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, a three-galleried courtyard-type space constructed predominantly of oak, with a deep thrust stage, the actor Brian Cox spoke of its ability to blend the epic and the intimate.[12] Something of the same sort might be said about the Globe, though the terms need modification to allow for the anti-illusionistic effect of the daylight auditorium. Where the Swan uses the full range of modern stage lighting, on the Globe stage the actor is exposed, not only by his three-dimensional presence within an embracing range of galleries, but as a result of sharing the same visual space with his audience, unmodified by the conditioning effects of illusionistic lighting. The stage at the Globe is high (about five feet), thus clearly separating the actor from the spectator. Yet the stage cannot be said to be a privileged space, except in a limited sense. The results for the player and the audience are numerous. At the most obvious end of the spectrum, interplay between stage and auditorium is encouraged and made easy. The backchat between Launce and the spectators, amusingly abetted by Launce's dog, in the prologue season's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, was one of the enlivening elements of the production. No doubt there is a boundary to be learned and observed here, as Shakespeare seems to suggest in Hamlet's remarks to the players, directing the clown to speak no more than is set down for him – remarks that followed the departure from the company of the extemporising Kemp, to be replaced by the more contained Armin. But other more subtle and elusive effects remain to be learned on the Globe stage, such as sharing the same visual space with Macbeth's murderous self-communing – and murderous action – or the tragic loading of Othello's bed. Perhaps it may be said that in the contemporary theatre we have already discovered something of these effects in outdoor productions, or in a studio production such as Trevor Nunn's famous *Macbeth*. Yet there are usually devices of one kind or another even in the most experimental production to separate audience from stage. At the Globe, the separation will be in terms of costume and gesture and sometimes voice, significant elements of performance to be sure, but by no means cancelling the kind of naturalism that goes with proximity and daylight. Yet this intimacy, for all its importance as an element of the experience, is qualified at the rebuilt Globe by the epic scale of the place and the presence (ideally) of a full house of spectators – even if their number in the modern playhouse is no more than 1400, as compared with the 3000 spoken of in early reports. Elizabethan reaction to the playhouses emphasised how sumptuous they seemed, with words such as gorgeous and stately routinely applied to the outdoor amphitheatres. The traveller Thomas Coryat, to take a representative case, derided the Venetian playhouses in a publication of 1611 as 'very beggarly and base in comparison of our stately play-houses in England'.[13] The scale and the sumptuous decoration (a telling matter, this) of the rebuilt

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Globe will undoubtedly affect an audience's reading of the stage-spectacle, giving it an aspect, if not of the epic, at least of the imposing and grand. Events taking place before the carved and painted *scenae frons*, between marbled and embellished pillars, and under a lavishly decorated heavens (or stage roof) will be read, in performances of the more serious scripts at any rate, as being of momentous significance. In Shakespeare's case, the characteristically exotic locations of the comedies will also seem aptly continuous with the elaborate decor.

There are other features of watching plays in the rebuilt theatre that will affect the total experience. A member of the audience will be acutely conscious in this daylight playhouse of all the other audience members – not unlike a football crowd again – including those who come to be seen as well as to see, sitting in the Lords' rooms or Gentlemen's rooms. He or she will be caught up in an audience's common reactions, when the alchemy of the occasion successfully draws the watching spectators together. A laugh or a gasp, or for that matter a hoot of derision, runs round an amphitheatre or courtyard theatre with a readiness and vigour that in a proscenium house it does not. We have become accustomed in modern playhouses, from the Edinburgh Traverse or The Other Place at Stratford on Avon to the National Theatre's Cottesloe, to seeing our fellow spectators. At first this induces a degree of self-consciousness, even alienation. Then the sense of common purpose and common enjoyment blots out the discomfort. But not without leaving a residue of detachment, as audience members with quirkish habits or outlandish clothing claim our attention. The Elizabethan spectators, with their experience of theatre firmly grounded in fairground performance or touring fit-ups, were fully accustomed to this kind of fragile attentiveness, no doubt exacerbated for those standing in the playhouse yard by jostling among their fellow groundlings and, perhaps, if report runs true, by commercial and even amatory activity. We are not so accustomed. John Russell Brown has written convincingly of the need for the Elizabethan actor to *take over* his audience by the sheer power of his language and the sheer vigour of his performance.[14] When this was successful the outcome must have been magical. Shakespeare felt bold enough to have his Paulina say to the stage-audience (but equally to the playhouse-audience), as she unveiled the statue of Hermione, (*The Winter's Tale*, V. iii. 21; given at the Globe 15 May 1611) 'I like your silence'. But not infrequently the audience must have been distracted and restless.[15] It will be a fascinating matter to see how actors of the rebuilt Globe learn to play upon the imaginations of their audience. We may well learn a good deal from them not only about the tactics of audience engagement but also about that elusive matter, the rhythms of the Shakespearean script.

Bernard Beckerman has written that the Globe 'was a theater built by actors for actors'.[16] Even if one may quibble with the detail of this (Richard Burbage was an actor, but his brother Cuthbert was not, and their father James, the builder of the original Theatre, became principally an impressario) in spirit it is right. The success or otherwise of the new Globe will depend upon the actors' discovery of how to tune their performance in all its aspects, visual and aural, to the conditions of the rebuilt playhouse. Yet the audience has its part to play too, especially given that actors and audience share at the Globe the same visual space. But here problems that go close to the heart of the enterprise begin to make themselves apparent. The modern actor cannot turn himself into the Elizabethan actor, however adaptable he may be. Even if we knew a great deal more about Elizabethan performance techniques – and we know very little indeed – too much theatre-history, and television and

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