

## 'THIS LUXURIOUS CIRCLE':<sup>1</sup> THE GLOBE THEATRE

Reconstructions of the Globe theatre have always betrayed the prejudices of their notional architects. It will be as well if I declare mine at the outset. The structure we are trying to resurrect is one in which plays were performed with a minimum of scenic and mechanical aids, in costumes whose lavishness would surprise us more than it surprised the first audiences. It is a theatre in which Lear's descent on Fortune's wheel will be visibly emphasised, not by changes of scenery, but by changes of costume. Disguise flourishes on such a stage, because it stands out, and because the audience is interested in clothes.

When James Burbage built the Theatre in 1576, he had the ambiguous precedent of the Red Lion behind him. The Red Lion project was undertaken by Burbage's brother-in-law, John Brayne, a grocer from Bucklersbury. Documents newly discovered in 1983 have corrected earlier assumptions that Brayne's Red Lion venture involved nothing more than the modest conversion of an inn-yard for occasional use by players. The Red Lion was, in fact, a farmhouse, situated outside the city walls in the village of Whitechapel, and Brayne's architectural plans, drawn up in 1567, were for a much more ambitious and specialised structure than scholars had realised. In addition to galleries surrounding the courtyard, probably on three sides, there was to be a 'Scaffolde or stage for enterludes or playes', 5 feet high and some 40 feet x 30 feet in dimension. There were specific plans for a trapdoor 'in such convenient place of the same stage as the said John Braynes shall thynk convenient' and a turret, 30 feet high and 'set upon plates', presumably to stabilise it. We can further presume that the turret was secured to the scaffold, thus providing a backing unit which could serve as a dressing room and access from or onto the stage. The turret was not connected to the galleries. It was part of the stage unit. Very possibly, it was designed for easy dismantling, along with the scaffold. Two features of the Red Lion are of particular interest. The records of the lawsuit from which our information is derived contain the only known reference to the height of an Elizabethan stage, and the dimensions of that stage are astonishingly close to those of the

Globe and the Fortune, built over thirty years later. John Brayne had anticipated the needs of the emergent professional theatre with remarkable accuracy. What we do not know is whether the Red Lion was ever completed or who, if anyone, used it.

Whatever the hidden history of the Red Lion may have been, it was not so disastrous as to deter Brayne from trying again. He was James Burbage's business partner in the building of the Theatre. We may, on the assumption that the Red Lion failed, see in this new project a commercial leap in the dark, but, even without the precedent of the Red Lion, it was not an architectural breakthrough. Plays had been performed in public places for centuries. The raised stage, boards supported on barrels or trestles, was a practical refinement. It was easier to lift into visibility a small number of actors than a large number of spectators. The curtained booth at the back of that raised stage was a further refinement, extending the players' range of shifts and surprises. An amateur troupe, looking to recoup expenses, would rely on the collecting of coins from a satisfied audience; but the custom of 'bottling' is tedious and unreliable. Spectators can evade a bottler by drifting off. The enclosed space of an inn-yard had commercial advantages for both the players and the publican. Guildhalls or any available indoor space facilitated the move towards charging for admission. The popular pleasure in watching animals kill each other had also an influence on the development of the playhouse. Twenty people could stand around a yard to watch cocks fighting, but of two hundred the majority would see little more than the back of a human neck. The tiered auditoria of the cockpits were a practical response. Bear- and bull-baiting required more room and greater safety precautions. Between 1546 and 1576 there were six baiting rings, most of them short-lived, on the Bankside. They pointed the way towards the establishment of such an ambitious, specialist structure as the Theatre, without themselves suiting Burbage's purpose.<sup>2</sup> It is probable that Burbage, as a hard-headed but not particularly wealthy man, would have settled for the leasing and converting of an existing structure had such a structure been available. The fact that he and John Brayne risked up to £683 on building their playhouse invites us to be cautious in applying too readily the arguments that the 'typical Elizabethan playhouse' – if such a thing can be clearly seen to have existed – was like an inn-yard, or like a baiting arena. On the other hand, we should be cautious about assuming that Burbage had the nerve to erect a building suitable for the staging of plays and for nothing else. It is more after the style of a bad grocer than a thrifty master-carpenter to put all his eggs into one basket. The likelihood is that, when he built the Theatre, Burbage gave it a stage that could be removed. There would have been precious little point in fixing it permanently, and no precedent either. The wiser innovations would have been in the provision of facilities for the audience, ensuring both their comfort and an efficient way of collecting

their money, and of 'back-stage' space for dressing, for storage, and for the effective preparation of all kinds of entertainment.

The Theatre probably had three galleries, surrounding an open yard. Its basic frame may have looked 'round', but was almost certainly polygonal. Practical carpentry, given the implausibility of circular timbers and round trees, would have demanded as much. Richard Hosley, taking his starting-point in building rather than in architecture, proposes 'a large number of sides such as sixteen, eighteen, twenty, or twenty-four'.<sup>3</sup> Remembering the comparative ease with which the Theatre was dismantled in 1598-9, Herbert Berry makes the sensible suggestion that many of the main members of the frame were held together 'not in the usual way, with neatly fitted joints, mortices, tenons, and dowels, but with ironmongery which could be easily unscrewed or bolted'.<sup>4</sup> As the original lease makes clear, Burbage thought of his new building as something closer to a tent than to a castle. He was empowered to 'take down and Carrie awaie . . . all such buildings and other things as should be builded erected or sett vpp'. The fact that the timbers of the Theatre were incorporated in the Globe has tempted Irwin Smith and Richard Hosley to the assertion that the basic frame of the Theatre and the Globe 'must have been, piece-for-piece and timber-for-timber, the same'.<sup>5</sup> Since it is based on carpentry rather than sentiment, the argument is appealing, but it assumes that almost all the original timbers were immediately redeployed, and that can only be a guess. The Burbages later talked of 'usinge and Disposing of the woodde and tymber of the saide Playe house'. It is quite as feasible that few of the timbers were found suitable for the Globe as that most of them were.

The frame of the Theatre is of less immediate interest than its stage. We can safely assume that it was a simple platform, probably on trestles, backed by a tiring house that stood against the frame but separate from it. When Henslowe planned his adaptable Hope thirty-seven years later, he instructed the builders to provide a 'fit and convenient Tyre house and a stage to be carryed or taken awaie, and to stande uppon tressells'. There is no evidence and not much likelihood that there was a roof over the Theatre's stage, though Burbage might have added one early in 1592, when building and repairs cost him £30 or £40. Henslowe was paying for extensive work at the Rose at exactly the same time, so that there is a strong possibility of theatrical competition along the lines of 'anything you can do I can do better'. The idea of a free-standing stage, complete with dressing rooms, plonked at one end of an arena has appealed to few scholars before Glynne Wickham; but it makes excellent sense if that arena is to be genuinely adaptable. Clear the stage and tiring house, and the audience can fill the complete circle of the galleries to look down on the popular displays of fencing or, with adequate safety precautions, animal-baiting. Access from the simple tiring house to the stage would be through either of the two doors which seem to have been a common feature of

Elizabethan stages. The basis is the booth stage, and Burbage would have added few refinements. There was, in 1576, no great store of plays, and those that existed were not written for technically complex performance.

Between 1576 and 1599, there were significant developments, not the least of them the building of the Rose in 1587 and the Swan in 1595. The first thing to notice about the Rose is its location. Henslowe chose to build it near his home in the old borough of Southwark. Although the City of London had assumed formal jurisdiction of Southwark in 1550, the citizens on the Surrey side of the Thames continued to display a defiance of metropolitan authority that had its origin in the notorious lawlessness of Southwark's earlier history. Furthermore, the Bankside was largely partitioned into 'liberties' and 'manors', areas previously or currently in the possession of a Lord and therefore outside London's direct jurisdiction. The Rose was built in the Liberty of the Clink, among the lines of fashionable and not-so-fashionable brothels that increased the Bankside's drawing power. The very name 'rose' was a street euphemism for a prostitute, and it is very probable that Henslowe augmented his playhouse profits by retaining the old Rose brothel as well. There was no shortage of distinguished company in the business. The first Lord Hunsdon, cousin to Elizabeth I and, as Lord Chamberlain, soon to become patron of Shakespeare's company of players, was enriched by the brothel trade in the Paris Garden Manor, of which he was Lord. But this is not to imply that the Rose was a squalid structure. On the contrary, it was considered 'magnificent' by Johannes de Witt in 1596, and there is every indication that Henslowe intended it to look lavish. Most probably, its stucco was given a green, mock-marble finish, designed to be as eye-catching as possible. But it is the inside of the Rose that has been brought into new prominence by the excavations of the site in 1989, and it is to the new discoveries made then that we should pay particular attention.

The unearthing of the Rose's foundations has provided our first visible evidence of the shape, structure and dimensions of an Elizabethan theatre. Further excavations on the nearby site of the Globe are in prospect, although it appears that only a very small portion of the foundations of Shakespeare's theatre will be available for scrutiny. The Rose discoveries, then, are of the utmost importance; but there is a need for caution in assessing them. We must not, for example, assume that all Elizabethan theatres were the same. Available evidence suggests that Henslowe and his partner Cholmley invested in the original building only about half as much as Burbage and Brayne had invested in the Theatre a decade earlier, and it may be that their thrift is a sufficient explanation of the unexpected smallness of the Rose. John Orrell's detailed work on the Globe has led him to the belief that that theatre had a diameter of about 100 feet and its inner yard a diameter of 70 feet, a figure not supported by the findings of the 1989 Globe excavations.<sup>6</sup> The Rose, by contrast, has an inner

diameter of about 66 feet and its inner yard a diameter of about 49 feet. Inevitably, the stage is proportionately smaller than that of the later Fortune and, by inference, the Globe, on which the Fortune stage was modelled. But, if the surviving substructure of the Rose stage can be relied on as evidence, there are two features that are more surprising. Firstly, the platform tapered from back to front, so that its upstage width of about 37 feet may have dwindled to 27 feet at the front; and secondly, it was only about 17 feet deep, which means that it jutted only about two-fifths of the way into the yard rather than to the middle, as was specified in the Fortune contract. This proposes a rather different actor-audience relationship, with the actors in flatter lines playing *in front of* a greater proportion of the audience than has been generally assumed in recent years. It could well be argued that such an arrangement suited the rhetorical style of Edward Alleyn, leading actor of the Admiral's Men at the Rose, better than it would have suited Shakespeare's more robust colleague, Richard Burbage. It is certainly of significance that, when Henslowe ordered major alterations to the Rose in 1592, the stage dimensions remained much the same.

It is probable that the 1592 alterations were largely dictated by a determination to increase the capacity of the galleries. It seems likely that the original Rose had a free-standing 'turret' of the same kind as the Red Lion had housed. Possibly, in 1592, when he had the stage moved backwards, Henslowe dispensed with the turret, reconstructing the tiring house within the existing galleries. With the turret removed, the sight-lines of spectators in galleries behind the stage would no longer be obstructed. Again, there are implications for the actor-audience relationship. It has long been argued, though never proved, that there was a 'Lord's Room (or Rooms)' over and behind the stage, set aside for those privileged spectators who were as happy to be seen as to see. The forward impetus of actors on a thrust stage would have had to be tempered by an awareness of the audience behind, and account has to be taken of the possibility that Elizabethan performance was always 'in the round'. I do not believe that stage grouping would have been radically affected by this, though the individual actor would have been at liberty, and perhaps expected, to address those in the Lord's Room on occasion.

One thing is confirmed by the foundations of the Rose. The building was polygonal, probably fourteen-sided, with each 'side' about 15 feet long. But if speculation on that issue can now be put to rest, the discovery that the front half of the yard sloped down towards the stage is utterly unexpected. In terms of sight-lines, this raking makes excellent sense, of course, as it may also in terms of drainage in a playhouse exposed to the weather. But if the Rose, built in 1587, exhibited such concern for the groundlings standing in the back half of the yard, could the Globe and the Fortune have afforded to disregard them? It is evident from the famous

drawing of the Swan – misleadingly known as the de Witt drawing – that there was no rake in that playhouse. The words 'planities sive arena' (flatness or arena) are clearly written along the empty space of the yard. We may conclude that the Swan, unlike the Rose, Globe and Fortune, was designed to house spectacles other than plays, or we may conclude that the raked yard of the Rose was an eccentricity which proved mysteriously unattractive. Speculation on this issue is in its infancy.

Before the Rose excavations, by far the most important surviving visual record of the interior of an Elizabethan theatre was a sketch of the Swan. This playhouse, built in 1595, was a first theatrical venture by the successful goldsmith, Francis Langley. A Dutch visitor to London, Johannes de Witt, found London's four theatres 'of notable beauty' when he visited them in 1596, but 'Of all the theatres . . . the largest and most distinguished is that of which the sign is a swan'. He made a sketch of it from a vantage-point in an upper gallery, and the sketch was copied by his friend Arend Van Buchell. It is that copy that has survived, and its ambiguous evidence can never be discounted. The Burbages would have looked at the Swan's example in building the Globe as surely as Henslowe looked to the example of the Globe in building the Fortune. Before turning to those features which the sketch makes clear, let us consider one which remains uncertain. If the tiring house of the Swan was built into the frame, de Witt has drawn it badly (or Van Buchell has copied it badly). It is true that my holiday sketch of the Sydney Opera House, adorning a letter to a friend in England and copied by him for the attention of somebody else, would be a flimsy source for a reconstruction of the stage and auditorium four centuries from now, and we do well to bear that caution in mind. Even so, the de Witt sketch is enough to make us wonder whether the Swan's stage and tiring house formed a separate unit, set inside a polygonal frame, after the fashion of the Red Lion. Plays had sufficiently proved their attractiveness by 1595 to justify the building of a public arena devoted solely to their presentation, but Langley might well have preferred to hedge his bets. The Elizabethans built their theatres to suit needs that were not already *known* but were being discovered through practice. The Globe was almost as much a present excitement as the plays it housed. It is likely that it marked an advance on the Swan in much the same degree as the Swan marked an advance on the Rose.

All serious attempts to reconstruct the Globe have been based primarily on the de Witt sketch of the Swan, and the findings at the Rose, however fascinating in themselves, seem unlikely to change that. Internal evidence from the Globe plays and inferences drawn from the Fortune contract may modify our conclusions, but anything that contradicts or flouts de Witt invites our question. (Those who argue for the existence and extensive use of an inner stage – and some still do, though with a weakening voice – will find no support in de Witt.) What he saw was a curved building,

close enough to being circular to encourage him to indicate lightly its complete circumference. The three galleries are clearly drawn, with entrances on either side of the stage. There would have been door-keepers, to gather pennies, at these if they were the 'ingressus' to the galleries, a probability not contradicted by their possible use in reverse by actors as an 'ingressus' to the yard.<sup>7</sup> The galleries are variously titled. A plausible interpretation sees the top one, marked 'porticus', as a walkway, perhaps with standing room only, but used more disreputably as a place of assignation for gallants, apprentices, prostitutes, or country wives. The middle gallery is distinctly a seating area, 'sedilia' allowing of no other interpretation, whilst de Witt has exploited his knowledge of the Roman theatre in describing the lowest gallery as an 'orchestra'.<sup>8</sup> The orchestra of the Roman theatres was left empty unless distinguished spectators were in attendance. It is not easy to know what to make of de Witt's use of the word. The section of the gallery on which he writes it would be fine for those who came to be seen, inadequate for those who came to see. Audibility would be a major problem only if the actors were standing on the opposite side of the stage and speaking away, and there would always be some sense of intimate contact with the stage. But if the whole bottom gallery is being described by de Witt as the 'orchestra', some questions are raised. If the groundlings gathered in front of the stage, would they not impede the view for some of the occupants of the bottom gallery? Or was the gallery raised well above ground level? Or was de Witt writing in ignorance, having himself watched a performance from the upper gallery and sketched the theatre from the same vantage-point? Or is there an explanation in the claim that the Swan was essentially an aural theatre rather than a visual one?<sup>9</sup> From the point of view of the actors, the remotest section of the whole audience would have been those facing the stage in the bottom gallery. The conclusion has to be that we do not know which would have been considered the prime seats by an Elizabethan theatregoer, and that de Witt does not really help us to find out. His claim that the Swan had seating accommodation for 3,000 must be, however understandably, an exaggeration. It suggests that, where certainty was out of reach, he was prepared to approximate – a further cause for prudence in the assessing of the evidence provided by his drawing.

Two further features of de Witt's sketch will repay brief consideration before we turn to the stage itself. The first is the description of the yard as 'planities sive arena'. Familiar with the terraced seating of the Roman theatres, de Witt was obviously struck by the level ground in front of and around the stage. He describes it simply as 'flatness' (*planities*). But he evidently found the single word inadequate, and added the alternative 'arena'. *Planities* is a neutral word, without theatrical reference in the Roman world, whereas *arena* is associated with the most violent and the most acrobatic of Roman entertainments. There is just a hint in the pairing

of the two words that the flatness of the yard was, during de Witt's visit, used by the actors as well as by the spectators. We do not know that the yard was ever used during the performances, but the possibility that it was is strong. The temptation, particularly during the high jinks of the post-play jig, must have been hard to resist. A standing audience is easily moved and readily re-grouped round an outstanding focus of activity. The second, and more insistent, feature of the drawing is the human figures it reproduces. There are three actors, but no audience. Is it a rehearsal? Perhaps, but there is a man in the roof-top hut, blowing a trumpet to announce the imminence of a performance. The sketch is too general to be a depiction of anything so particular as the last-minute rush to perfect a tricky scene. And what of the row of people in the gallery above the stage doors? Are they musicians? Or are they the privileged spectators for whom the Lord's Room is reserved? We have to conclude that the sketch is a composite of impressions, recording some of the memorable elements of an occasion that excited de Witt's intelligence. The human figures help to establish a sense of scale, but they tell us nothing very certain. Yet no study of Elizabethan acting can afford to neglect the placing and the gesture of this oddly contrasting trio of players. What the sketch boldly presents to us is a platform thrusting out into the yard. It is big. We know that the Fortune stage was 43 feet wide, and that it thrust out about 27 feet 'to the middle of the yard'. The stage dimensions of both the Swan and the Globe were similar. Timid acting has no chance in such a setting. The Elizabethan actor, if he was to be effective, must have determined to dominate both the platform and the surrounding audience. Nor is it simply a matter of underfoot dimensions. Acting in the open air reduces the apparent size of an actor as surely as a low ceiling increases it. It is not a setting for inward acting. Passion cannot be contained. It has to be shown.

There remain for consideration the outstanding features of the Swan stage as de Witt reveals them. The first three are negatives. There is no concealment of the understage area. It seems unlikely that this was normal practice. A tipsy apprentice could have caused quite a disturbance by getting underneath and acting the mole – something which the ghost of old Hamlet presumably did at the Globe. However the Swan stage was supported, and de Witt's props are remarkably crude, the probability is that some attempt was made to mask it. There is, secondly, no sign whatsoever of a trap-door in the platform. That may simply be an oversight. De Witt may have seen a performance in which there was no call for a trap. He has, anyway, not concerned himself with the surface of the stage. The third negative, the absence of an inner stage or, indeed, of any discovery space at all, is less ambiguous. The inner stage is an invention of later scholars, who could envisage drama in performance only if it had a proscenium arch to frame it. There is no evidence at all of the existence

have thought of it in 1595, and the Chamberlain's Men had insufficient resources in 1599. The pillars, then, were a feature of the later Elizabethan public theatres – but no one liked them enough to erect unnecessary imitations on the indoor stages.

We come, finally, to the gallery above the stage doors. De Witt depicts it in six sections and filled with people. Seen in isolation from its surroundings, the tiring house facade with its two doors and superior gallery is irresistibly reminiscent of the halls in great Tudor houses and palaces, or of Oxbridge refectories, and these were, of course, familiar venues for touring actors. The similarity adds weight to the view that this gallery was primarily intended for musicians. The only surviving play that was certainly performed at the Swan, Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, calls for 'a sad song in the Musicke-Room'. Against that, we have seen Jonson referring to the Lord's Room 'over the stage' at the Globe. The probability is that the gallery served both purposes, and that it was available for actors appearing 'above' as well.

However impressionistic it was, de Witt's drawing gives us a strong feel for the varied style of Elizabethan performance. Downstage centre is a piece of substantial stage furniture, a bench much plainer than the richly gowned actor sitting on it. Behind and just far enough to the right of the seated actor to be visible to most of the audience is a 'lady'. Her gesture is formal and balanced. The third figure, extravagantly bearded and within poking distance of the groundlings, could be about to do the splits. It is a characteristically Elizabethan conjunction of the stately and the grotesque. Behind the actors, the stage doors are shut, indicating, perhaps, that an indoor scene is in progress. When one of the stage doors opens, anything could happen.

Because of the chance survival of de Witt's sketch we have invaluable external evidence of the facilities at the Swan, but we have only one play to give dramatic life to that evidence. The position at the Globe is exactly reversed. We have no really valuable external evidence, but several plays from which to draw conclusions. Stage directions, either explicit or implicit, reveal a certain amount, but we must be prepared, in reaching for certainty, often to settle for probability. Some of the characteristic features of performance on the Swan/Globe stage can be explored, in an atmosphere of reduced critical anxiety, in some of the non-Shakespearean plays that were presented at the Globe by the Chamberlain's Men.

#### ENTRANCES AND EXITS

Most exits in Elizabethan drama are announced in words before they are carried through in action. A selection from *Volpone* makes the point no better than any other selection would:

of an acting space between and behind the stage doors. Nor should we expect any. Elizabethan actors came out on to the platform to present their story. They would have been defying convention and the common sense of visibility and audibility if they had retreated behind it, carrying the story with them.

De Witt gives us only two wooden double-doors, with heavy hinges that clearly indicate that the doors opened outwards on to the stage. The lack of curtains or drapes of any kind is not decisive. We would not expect these to be permanent, but neither would they be difficult to set if and when required. The doors, set square into the tiring house facade, provide the actors with a strong upstage entrance, and with a lot of ground to cover before they reach a commanding speaking position. The move downstage into contact with the full audience is not made easier by the surprisingly bulky Corinthian columns, standing perhaps 12 feet from the tiring house. They are there to satisfy the demands of a theatre more technically advanced than James Burbage could have anticipated in 1576. The canopy they support, often supposed to have been decorated with symbolic representations of heavenly bodies from which it derived the shorthand name of 'Heavens', was roomy enough to accommodate a throne and any actor who was required to 'fly' down to the platform. Suspension gear for these 'flyings' was probably housed in the hut behind de Witt's trumpeter. The evidence for this is not, of course, in the drawings; but we know that, before the Swan was built, Henslowe had paid £7-2s for 'mackinge the throne in the hevenes' at the Rose. Langley would not have allowed his proud theatre to drop behind the times. By the time Jonson wrote his prologue for the 1612 revival of *Every Man in His Humour*, boasting that this was to be a play:

Where neither Chorus wafts you o'er the seas,  
Nor creaking throne comes down, the boys to please . . .

the elaborate Heavens, throne and flying-effects were commonplace. Elizabethan theatre companies had a professional ability to make virtue of necessity, and the stage pillars were habitually incorporated in the action. Even so, it is difficult to deny that performance would have been easier without them. It is something of a relief to find Henslowe instructing the builder of the Hope to 'builde the Heavens all over the saide stage, to be borne or carried without any postes or supporters to be fixed or settypon the saide stage'. It was the essential purpose of the canopy to protect the actors from rain, and to provide mechanical effects. The science of timber roofing in Tudor England was sufficiently advanced for the roofing of the stage at the Swan or the Globe to have been contrived without supporting pillars. The problem was one of cost. Henslowe could afford it in 1613. C. Walter Hodges has argued fascinatingly that the Burbages also could afford it when they rebuilt the Globe in 1614.<sup>10</sup> But Langley may not



I will go see her, though but at her window. (I.v.127)  
 Lead, I follow thee. (III.ii.70)  
 Patron, go in, and pray for our success. (III.ix.62)  
 Will you go, madam? (IV.iii.17)

There is nothing surprising about this. An unobtrusive exit from an open stage is almost a contradiction, and there was no conventional equivalent for the device of dropping a curtain on a conversation that can be supposed to continue in the same place after the audience has ceased to listen. In order to enable the actor to make the turn and take the steps towards the stage door, the dramatist usually provided him with a cue to leave. A concluding couplet was an aural equivalent.

The entrance on to the platform in mid-scene is almost always prepared for, too. The shocking arrival or the untimely return, dear to the writers of farce and melodrama, were not part of the Elizabethan dramatist's stock-in-trade. Bonario's interruption of the attempted rape of Celia by Volpone may surprise Volpone, but the audience has already learned that Bonario is in the house. And how differently a nineteenth-century dramatist might have treated the ghosts of old Hamlet and Banquo, or Sebastian's sudden incarnation in Illyria and Orlando's violation of Duke Senior's feast. The sudden bursting open of the stage door at the Globe to reveal, with the accompaniment of a triumphant or menacing drum-beat, the hero or the villain is notably absent. A later taste would have preferred to see the scene of Cordelia's death in *King Lear*, probably with the arrival in the nick of time of the saving message from Edmund. Tragic time, of course, has no nick, but the interesting fact would seem to be that the stage doors did not invite this kind of dramatic thrill. It is not a matter of superior dramatists refusing to stoop to low tricks. Elizabethan dramatists would have tried anything. The lack of such entrances is strong presumptive evidence that the positioning of the stage doors discouraged them. The doors were too far upstage, too remote from the focus of attention, and too distant for easy audibility. (Lingering adherents of the 'inner stage' might note that it would have been worse still in each respect, had it existed.) It is precisely because the audience is attending to the action downstage that the upstage entrances have to be prepared for. Mosca always announces Volpone's visitors, not only to give Volpone time to prepare himself, but also to give the audience the signal. If an actor has a good entrance, he does not want any of his audience to miss it.

Since there was no way of pre-setting a scene, all Elizabethan plays began with an entrance. The roof-top trumpet and the traditional knocking of the stage were attempts to settle the audience into preparedness for that first entrance. Even so, actors probably liked a prologue to do more of the work for them. Volpone's opening lines are too important to be risked.

Jonson provides a prologue to involve the audience and stir it up. It was said of Sir Henry Irving, during his occupation of the Lyceum at the end of the nineteenth century, that he would never stage a play that gave him the opening scene. He liked a build-up. Elizabethan actors were less self-protective, their art less removed from the world of their audience. Even so, Burbage (if it was he) would have been glad of an attentive house for the first lines of *Volpone*. This is not, of course, a 'typical' entrance. Volpone's passage downstage is conditioned by the placing of the enclosure containing his gold. We know from a later stage direction, 'Volpone peeps from behind a traverse' (V.iii.8), that curtains were used in this play. A traverse is the likeliest concealment for the gold, too. When we read the opening two lines of *Volpone*:

Good morning to the day; and next, my gold!  
 Open the shrine, that I may see my saint.

we have to picture the entrance, through the same stage door of Volpone and Mosca, their immediate moving apart, Mosca to the traverse, Volpone to a point that will give him a view of his money without blocking the audience's, the opening line spoken out only after Volpone has walked at least 20 feet downstage,<sup>11</sup> and a silent turn in contemplation before the subsequent outburst into blasphemous apostrophe.

The primary aim of Elizabethan staging was to maximise the presence of the actor. To allow him the diminution of a dragging exit or an unannounced and unobtrusive entrance would be to threaten his presence. The 'ability of body', which was the actor's pride and the playwright's resource, could not be so carelessly treated.

## STAGE DOORS

Elizabethan plays are written in scenes. Act divisions are often editorial afterthoughts, and rarely if ever essential to the shaping of the story. Because so many of the scenes are short, and because the flow of the action is therefore dependent on the smoothness of entrances and exits, stagecraft was dominated by the need to maintain access to and from the stage doors. After analysing 276 plays from the period 1599-1642, T. J. King concluded that 'playwrights of the period thought of the stage as having two entrances'.<sup>12</sup> There is nothing in the surviving Globe plays that demands a third door, though resourceful actors would have made good use of any touring venue that provided three. That some explicit use of the doors occurs in these plays is less surprising than that so little explicit use occurs. I have already suggested that this was a result of their remoteness from the centre of attention. That they were conventionally used for simultaneous entries by characters about to meet is suggested by common sense, and also by such stage directions as this from Marston's *The*

*Malcontent*: 'Enter Malevole at one door; Biancha, Emilia, and Maquerelle at the other door.'<sup>13</sup> Slightly more adventurous theatrically is the use implied in the dispute between Mosca and Lady Politic Would-Be in *Volpone*. The Lady is determined to see Volpone, Mosca equally determined that she shall not:

LADY: No, I'll go see your patron.

MOSCA:

That you shall not:

I'll tell you why. My purpose is, to urge

My patron to reform his will . . .

(*IV. vi. 95-7*)

Implicit in the dialogue here is the urge of one actor towards one stage door, and the stronger pull of the second actor towards the other stage door. Such confrontation of alternative exit routes is a common feature in scene-closes in Elizabethan drama. But there are livelier possibilities. Jonson, typically, is alert to them. A wonderfully inventive scene in the Globe play, *Every Man out of His Humour*, shows Fallace in furious dispute with her husband Deliro and with Macilente. 'I'll not bide here for all the gold and silver in Heaven,' she says, and storms out through one of the doors. 'O good Macilente, let's follow and appease her, or the peace of my life is at an end,' says Deliro, and they go out through the same door. With all the aplomb of a twentieth-century farceur, Jonson lets Fallace turn the tables on the men by immediately bursting back through that now-important door and 'locking' it. The stage direction reads: 'Re-enter Fallace running, and claps to the door.' She then shouts a warning to her husband that she will 'do myself a mischief' if he comes in, and his protests are heard from within the tiring house 'offstage'.<sup>14</sup> Jonson is here turning convention into reality. It is an example of his fascination with the material paraphernalia of his stage. But such direct use of the stage doors, unprotected by convention, is exceptional. Their normal neutrality is vital to the smooth conduct of a story. Whilst they may sometimes represent real doors, they may equally provide access to a seashore in Illyria or to a plain in Syria.

### THE FREEDOM OF THE STAGE

From the moment when Fallace 'claps to the door', about a minute of stage time elapses before, in the words of the stage direction, 'Deliro and Macilente pass over the stage'. We do not know what precisely was meant by this frequently encountered direction. In the context of this particular scene, Allardyce Nicoll's suggestion that the actors came into the yard through one 'ingressus', climbed up on to the stage, crossed it, descended into the yard at the other side, and made their exit through the opposite 'ingressus' is attractive.<sup>15</sup> What the scene certainly illustrates — Professor

Nicoll's proposal is less widely accepted than the alternative view that the passing over of the stage involved nothing more than an entrance at one door and an exit at the other — is the speed with which location could be changed on the Globe platform. The space available to an actor at the Globe is roughly comparable to half of a tennis court (with the tramlines included, as in doubles play),<sup>16</sup> nor is that space cluttered with attempts to transform it into something resembling a quite different space. When an Elizabethan actor came out on to the platform, he came with or to other people much more often and more importantly than to a place. The characters take precedence over the location. Whatever its precise provenance, the surviving text of *A Yorkshire Tragedy* illustrates stagecraft at its most functional, even at its most perfunctory. An account of what happens over a sequence of 130 lines (lines 500-631) will show the variety of location and the rapidity of its shifts.

The unnamed Husband, having lost his fortune gambling, determines to murder his three sons to save them from beggary. 'Enters his little sonne with a top and a scourge', and with the fascinating complaint — on an open and empty stage — that 'I cannot scourge my top as long as you stand so: you take up all the room with your wide legs.' The Husband 'takes up the childe by the skirts of his long coate in one hand and draws his dagger with th' other.' He then stabs his son to death and carries him off. His exit at one stage door is matched by an entry — probably simultaneous — at the other: 'Enter a maide with a childe in her armes, the mother by her asleepe.' Presumably the thrusting out of a mobile platform is envisaged here, since an entry asleep would be inappropriately comic otherwise. Almost at once the Husband follows them in, still carrying his bleeding elder son, kills the child-in-arms, and wounds his Wife and a Servant. The dead children and the injured adults are left lying in one section of the stage — perhaps upstage of the pillars — and the Husband moves down to address himself and the audience:

My horse stands ready saddled. Away, away,

Now to my brat as nurse, my sucking beggar.

Fates, I'll not leave you one to trample on.

It is downstage of the pillars that he is met by the Master of the College attended by his younger brother. The audience must accept that he is now 'outside the house', and that the Master cannot see the carnage inside. 'Please you walk in Sir,' the Husband invites, and leads the Master out through one of the stage doors. The wounded Servant, having remained 'invisible' on stage throughout the brief Master/Husband dialogue, starts speaking as soon as the stage is clear, and the Master enters the house through the other stage door to discover the dead and wounded. Two minutes or so later, the stage is again briefly cleared, as Wife and Servant are led off to where 'a surgeon waits within', and there follows the

challenging stage direction: 'Enter Husband as being thrown off his horse, and falls.' He tells the audience both what has happened and where he is:

To throw me now within a flight o' th' Town,  
In such plain even ground, sot, a man may dice upon 't.

The entrance is remarkable, and it risks bathos, but the practice of supplying the audience with necessary information about the location is familiar. Where words are felt to be sufficient, scenic aids are superfluous.

It should be possible, after a careful study of these 130 lines from *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, to apply simple Elizabethan stagecraft to almost any scene from Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Two vital conventions are illustrated in them — the first of inaudibility, the second of invisibility. The audience accepts that actors on one part of the platform may not be heard by actors on another part of the platform, and it accepts also that actors who are visible to spectators may not be seen by other actors. If we add the convention of the impenetrability of disguise, we have the basis for intrigues quite as complex as need be.

The long opening scene of *Sejanus* is a fine example of Jonson's exploitation of the convention of inaudibility, as well as demonstrating the scope for significant groups on the open stage. Sabinus and Silius, having entered through different stage doors, establish themselves in a dominant downstage position, though not at the centre. They lead the group of disaffected patriots, commenting scathingly on Natta and Satrius, who are in unheard conversation upstage of them. When the audience is to hear what Natta and Satrius say, formal movement would permit but not necessitate a downstage travel. The passing over the stage of the Emperor's son Drusus and his retinue is another formal convention. It causes an adjustment of the on-stage groupings. When Sejanus and his sycophants also pass over the stage, it is in meaningful echo of a royal prerogative, telling us more of Sejanus's ambition than his own words do. Patterned movement of this kind on the Globe stage can carry its own significance. The entry of the Emperor Tiberius is, presumably, to the centrally positioned throne, his emblem of office. Around that throne takes place the dramatic confrontation of Drusus and Sejanus at the close of the scene. Drusus is standing near the throne when Sejanus enters 'followed with clients' to whom he distributes official documents:

SEJANUS: There is your bill, and yours; bring you your man:  
I have moved for you, too, Latarius.

DRUSUS: What?

Is your vast greatness grown so blindly, bold,  
That you will over us?

SEJANUS: Why, then give way.

DRUSUS: Give way, Colossus? Do you lift? Advance you?  
Take that. (*Drusus strikes him.*)

(I.i.560-5)

At a theatrical level, it is a fight for the centre of the stage. The competing clusters of friends and enemies have been able, throughout the scene, to conduct their conversations confident of their inaudibility, despite their on-stage proximity. Towards the end of the scene, battle is joined, and joined audibly.

The convention of invisibility is so frequently employed in Elizabethan drama that it scarcely needs illustration. Its acceptance by the audience does not preclude concealment if there was dramatic advantage to be taken of it, but it removes its necessity. The eavesdropping Duke of *Measure for Measure* need not hide from the audience in order to be unseen by Claudio and Isabella in III.i., nor need Claudius and Polonius 'bestow' themselves out of our sight when they witness Ophelia's encounter with Hamlet in III.i. They have the freedom either to leave the stage altogether, to take shelter beside a pillar or behind a curtain, or to remain in view. An actor is invisible to other actors if he says he is.

### DISCOVERY SPACES AND STAGE FURNITURE

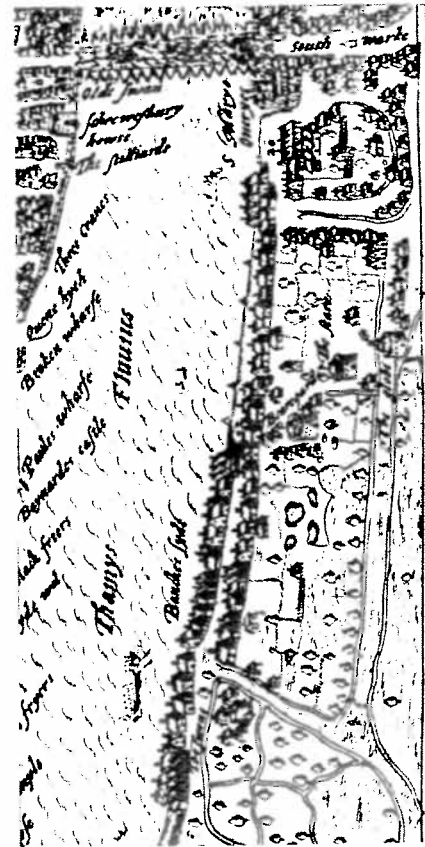
To say that the Globe stage did not provide hiding places for every fugitive from sight is not to say that it never did. The Chamberlain's Men were a pragmatic group, with a willing eye for a good effect and no reason to be slaves to convention. If the store contained a property box-tree, that would be a reason for Shakespeare's choosing to conceal Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and Fabian in a box-tree. Or perhaps an all-purpose shrubbery 'ground-row' could be used for *Twelfth Night* as well as for *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, where Young Clare instructs the escaping Millicent to 'Shadow yourself behind this brake of fern.' A few strokes of Richard Burbage's brush could have turned a box-tree into a fernbrake. The list of properties compiled by Henslowe in 1598 suggests that the Admiral's Men at least were not so restrictive. He mentions a bay tree, a tree of golden apples, a Tantalus tree, and two moss banks.<sup>17</sup> Butler, whose creation is the brightest achievement of George Wilkins's *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, is required to ascend a tree at the beginning of Act Four. He may, of course, have used one of the stage pillars, but a free-standing climbable tree was not beyond the ingenuity of the Chamberlain's Men. They had also in their repertoire *A Warning for Fair Women* (1598 or 1599), one of whose Dumb Shows calls for the sudden rising up and the abrupt chopping down of a great tree — an image of the rise and fall of Sanders. Certain large properties had always to be available. The throne is the outstanding one. We know, from both



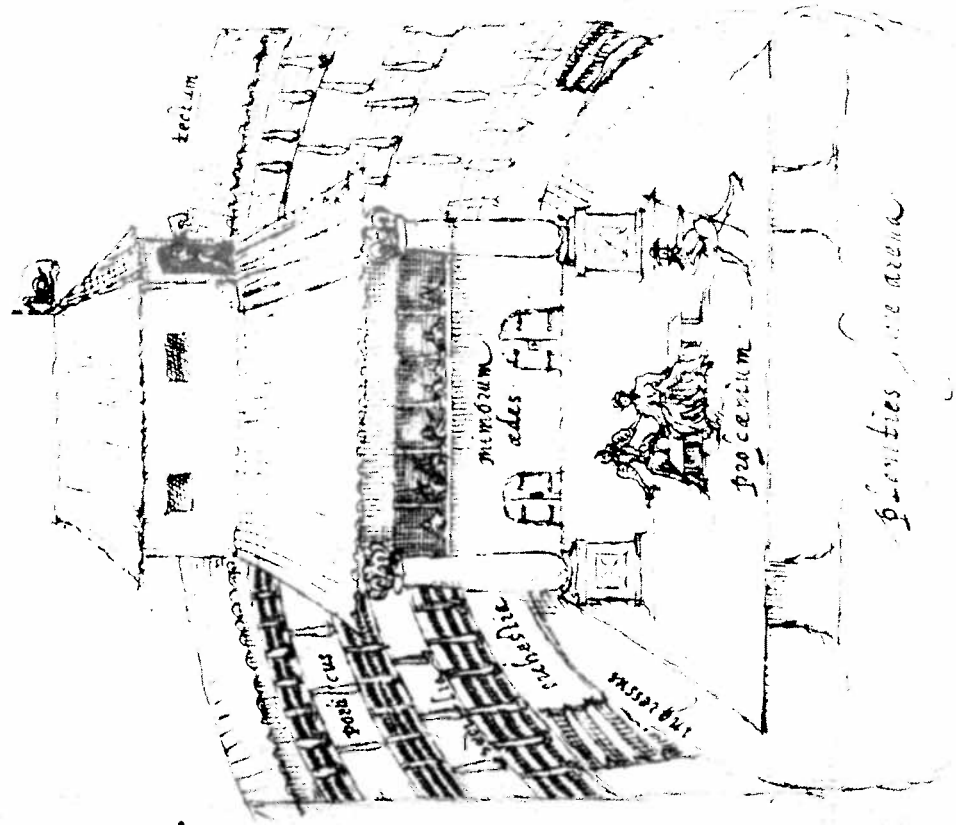




3a. Norden's 1600 revision of his Civitas Londini map. It gives a vivid impression of a busy water-front, and some indication of the sprawl of Southwark (Royal Library, Stockholm)



3b. Section of the Norden Civitas Londini map (Royal Library, Stockholm)



quoniam per se ipse et structura, officium romanum  
 omni signatum, in quo multi vultus sunt, et in fine  
 magnitudinis rari, defuncti carere et fortis dicitur, in  
 porticus, in aedem

4. De Witt's drawing of the Swan, c. 1596 (University Library, Utrecht)

have always a favoured system, and also the ability to adapt. For a company so familiar with the demands of touring, adaptability was an essential. It is equally true that the practical playwrights of the period would not present them with texts whose requirements were beyond them. Compared with the mechanical wonders of the court masques of Inigo Jones, or with the spectacular nineteenth-century stage, Globe performances were simple. But we should not suppose that they were unadventurous. How else can we explain the demand, from that most professional of contemporary playwrights Thomas Heywood, that Hercules should enter 'from a rock above tearing down trees?' *The Brazen Age*, in which this direction occurs, was written for Queen Anne's Men, playing probably at the not very reputable Red Bull, and probably in 1613, but it would be surprising if the King's Men could not by then, have matched the effect at the Globe, and presumptuous to claim to know just how they would have done it.

### BELOW AND ABOVE

The space under de Witt's Swan stage is generous enough to allow for the effective use of a trap-door. The Globe probably had one, but, if so, used it sparingly. Bernard Beckerman, who confidently asserts the existence of a downstage trap, has found only seven instances of its use in the extant Globe plays, four of them in *The Devil's Charter*.<sup>20</sup> And, whilst an available trap would have been useful in each of his instances, it would be a denial of theatrical resourcefulness to call it necessary. *Hamlet* provides the best-known case, but once the practicality of mobile platforms has been recognised, it has to be said that the grave-diggers and even Hamlet himself, can function without a sunken grave. Nor can the stage direction for *Macbeth* IV.i., informing the reader that each apparition 'descends', be confidently used as evidence. *Macbeth* was not published until 1623, by which time performance practice at the indoor Blackfriars had had its effect. That there was practical space below the stage is certainly implied by the activity of the Ghost in *Hamlet* I.v. After the first 'Swear' (1.149), Hamlet refers to 'this fellow in the cellarage', and guides Horatio and Marcellus to another part of the platform. After the second 'Swear' (1.155), he moves them again, this time, according to the dictates of formal logic, into closer proximity with the audience. The understage actor moves to the prearranged spot, and, for the third time, urges those immediately above him to 'Swear' (1.161). 'Well said, old mole! canst work i' the earth so fast?' comments Hamlet, at once establishing the nervous jocularity of his relationship with the Ghost and congratulating the Chamberlain's Men on a resourceful piece of stage business. The 'Music of hautboys under the stage' in *Antony and Cleopatra* (IV.iii.11) is less conclusive. The probability that the understage area was practical



12 Drawing illustrating the technique of changing rapiers, from Henri de Saint-Dieler's treatise on sword play (1573). (British Museum)



13 Woodcut from the pamphlet, *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Philippa Flower*, 1619. It is not so far from Banquo's description of the Witches in *Macbeth* (British Museum)

does not mean that it was pleasant. The *Hamlet* scene is an isolated example of its significant use, something which may argue a reluctance on the part of the actors to soil their costumes. Playing an oboe down there sounds like a musician's nightmare.

No such doubt surrounds the existence of a practical upper level at the Globe. There are instances where a raised unit constructed on stage seems to be implied, but the gallery above the stage doors is the likeliest regular resource. Celia could certainly appear here to throw down her handkerchief to Volpone in his mountebank disguise (II.ii.222). But the view from the third gallery would be poor, and audibility a problem throughout the theatre. The conclusion must be that the gallery in the tiring-house facade was ideal for the accommodation of a silent observer, but inadequate in every respect for any scene of prolonged dialogue. Beckerman has found only twelve scenes in the Globe plays that require the use of the 'above', much the most complex being scene ten of *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*.<sup>21</sup> This is, in fact, an un tidy piece of writing, showing evidence of hasty plotting and a bludgeoning of the audience into accepting shifts of focus. The outstanding special case is *Antony and Cleopatra* IV.xiii. It begins with the entry 'aloft' of Cleopatra, Charmian, and Iras, includes the stage direction 'They heave Anthony aloft to Cleopatra' (I.37), and contains the important last conversation of Cleopatra and the dying Antony. The mechanics of this scene invite, and have received, speculation in abundance. To take a recent example, Richard Hosley has suggested the use of suspension gear to raise Antony, seated on a chair, to the gallery over the stage. He calculates that the suspension line from the Heavens would have passed within 3 to 4 feet of the tiring-house facade, enabling Cleopatra or her maids to haul Antony in without difficulty.<sup>22</sup> There is no doubt that the enterprise of the company could have measured up to such a challenge, however serious the demand it may have made on the three boy actors in the gallery. The problem comes with the dialogue that follows the raising of Antony. To set one of the play's climactic moments at the back of the stage, behind at least a railing or bannister if not something more solid, seems to me to be lunacy. 'O! see my women, says Cleopatra as Antony dies, 'The crown o' the earth doth melt' (II.62-3). It is a feed-line, if spoken from the gallery at the back of the stage, for a groundling wag: 'Never mind the women seeing. What about us?' The preference, whatever the associated problems, must be for some structure erected on the platform proper, with upstage treads concealed from most of the audience. Access to the Monument for Cleopatra and her attendants would be through the stage door and up these treads. Diomedes then enters through the other stage door, and stands against the tiring-house facade to answer Cleopatra's question by telling her of Antony:

His death's upon him, but not dead.

Look out o' the other side your monument;

His guard have brought him thither.

(II.7-9)

The instruction can be obeyed quite literally. Cleopatra turns to look downstage as Antony is carried in. He dies, as any actor of the part would choose, in full view of the audience - and his body is carried out by way of the upstage treads and the stage door.

## MUSIC

If the gallery above the stage doors was used by the musicians, as seems likely, they would, on occasion, make way for the actors, as well as for the privileged guests in the Lord's Room. The exact composition of the Globe 'orchestra' is not known. Drums and trumpets, hautboys (harsher and louder than the modern oboe), strings, and plucked instruments like lutes and citherns were available, together with the plebeian pipes. Robert Armin and Augustine Phillips were accomplished musicians, and there were almost certainly other actors with instrumental skills. The boy actors were expected to sing, and it may be possible to trace the genius of Armin through the singing roles of Amiens, Feste, Pandarus, and Lear's Fool to its apotheosis in Autolycus. The boy actor of Desdemona had to be good enough to sing the willow-song unaccompanied, but his voice had probably broken before he had a chance to test himself against the supreme challenge of Ariel in *The Tempest*. Music, then, had an important part to play in Globe performances. Yet the Induction to Marston's *The Malcontent*, specially written by John Webster for its re-staging at the Globe by the King's Men, emphasises how much more important was the music in its original staging by the boys' company at the Blackfriars. 'What are your additions?' asks Sly in his assumed role as a would-be spectator, and Burbage answers:

Sooth, not greatly needful: only as your sallet to your great feast, to entertain a little more time, and to abridge the not-received custom of music in our theatre.

(II.79-82)

It is a comparative matter. We know that, when the Duke of Stettin-Pomerania watched the boys at the Blackfriars in 1602, the play was preceded by an hour of music, and that there was entr'acte music too. This is the 'not-received custom' at the Globe, and the extra 594 lines together with the part of Passarello, written in for Armin, are there to lengthen the play in compensation. But the opening of *The Malcontent* is a brilliant reversal of the audience's aural expectations. *Twelfth Night*

begins with music, performed to suit a love-sick duke, and we can be confident that the Globe audience, whilst it would not have *expected* an overture at any performance, would not have been astonished by one either. It is against familiar responses that Marston opens *The Malcontent* with 'The vilest out-of-tune music', an audibly startling emblem of the malcontent, Malevole, who 'gainst his fate/Repines and quarrels' (III.ii.11-12). It would seem that the Globe musicians were either well paid or good-humoured – or both. They played where they were sent – on stage, in the gallery over the stage, inside the tiring house, even, if the *Antony and Cleopatra* instruction is an honest guide, under the stage. It may be that their greatest pleasure came with the post-play jig, of which Jonson provides such a monstrous parody when Volpone's dwarf, her-maphrodite, and eunuch 'make sport' (I.ii.1-62).

### UPSTAGE AND DOWNSTAGE

Experienced actors, working behind a proscenium arch, will often, consciously or unconsciously, 'upstage' their fellows. They have an instinctive sense of focus. Louis Parker remembers seeing the famous Lyceum performances of *Othello*, when Irving 'generously' alternated Othello and Iago with the great American actor, Edwin Booth:<sup>23</sup>

We were quite ready to be polite to our American guest; but I think I can honestly say we never saw him. There was, to be sure, a pleasant gentleman representing Othello, but he was timid, he acted in corners; he seemed to beg us not to look at him. And, indeed, it was difficult to see him as all the time our Henry was doing clever bits of by-play, eating grapes and spitting out the pips in a significant manner, which rendered Booth invisible.

Such bad behaviour is a product of the star-system and of the picture-frame of the proscenium arch. Focus on the Elizabethan open stage was determined as much by the voice of the actor as by his gesture or position. But the terms 'upstage' and 'downstage' remain useful in visualising Globe performances. It is only a theatre-in-the-round that eliminates them completely. Upstage at the Globe, even with the audience on three sides, was the tiring-house facade. A straight move downstage to the edge of the platform took the actor very close to the building's architectural centre. It also took him very close to the audience in the yard. To achieve his greatest proximity to the gallery spectators, he would need to take up a position at either side or any corner of the platform, but he could not remain there without doing a disservice to half the audience. A passing over the stage that began and ended in the yard would have given an opportunity to a high proportion of the spectators to experience a pleasing sense of proximity to the actors, as well as gratifying the contemporary

love of processions and ceremonial splendour. The distinction between downstage and upstage at the Globe defines the relationship of the actor and his audience. Whilst King Lear remains regal, he will keep his distance, but the experience of the heath can carry him down to the edges and corners of the platform, where the Fool and Clown will always be at ease. Upstage of the pillars, beneath the shadow of the Heavens, is an area best suited to silent groups and to observers of an active scene. That is not to dub it a dead area. Its liveliness would depend on the nature of the story, and the dynamics that relate the various sections of the stage during a performance. A movement away from this shadowed area might be sufficient to suggest a change of location, given the further support of appropriate words, and could certainly detach the individual actor from his group, permitting the easy delivery of an aside or a soliloquy. The platform at the Globe belonged, not to a designer, but to the actors. It was they who changed the location, and who picked out the significance of the stage's permanent features to suit each story.