

THE
SHAKESPEAREAN PERFORMANCES
OF
SIR JOHN GIELGUD

by
Robert James Frost

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy of the University of Birmingham.

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

1st of 2 files

Introduction and Chapters 1-3

**The remaining chapters
and the appendices
are in an additional file**

SYNOPSIS

This thesis is a study of the stage history of six plays and three seasons of Shakespeare at the Old Vic as they are related to one man: Sir John Gielgud. Through the assembly of various sorts of evidence ranging from promptbooks, sound-recordings, reviews, programmes, interviews, correspondence, designer's blue-prints, I have attempted to reconstruct the performances and the productions in order to assess Gielgud's contribution as a Shakespearean actor and director. The plays looked at are Richard II, Hamlet, Much Ado About Nothing, King Lear and The Tempest, the Old Vic seasons those from 1929 to 1931. Each chapter, except for the first on the Old Vic which considers a repertory of productions of different plays performed by the same company, examines a series of separate productions of one play in chronological sequence to highlight developments in Gielgud's technique over the years and his response to the more widespread changes in the tradition of the stage interpretation of Shakespeare. So the selection of roles and productions was governed by the idea of examining trends and to set Gielgud's work in the context of the accumulating tradition of the play's interpretation in performance, not to look at single productions only. The resulting selection focuses on Gielgud, the actor and director, at various points throughout his entire career. The earliest production considered is in 1929, the latest in 1974.

The conclusion then attempts to draw Gielgud's involvement with Richard II, Hamlet, Much Ado About Nothing, King Lear and The Tempest together to establish an overall view of their relationship in the light of the principal currents of change in the theatre from the early part of this century to the present day. The appendices at the back list the

full range of Gielgud's Shakespeare, including his film appearances, and the dates of openings with complete casts of the productions concentrated on in the text. The thesis is approximately 130,000 words in length.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go out to Doug Gray, Chris Burton, and Donna Lamberton for advice and technical assistance with photographic reproduction. I am also grateful to all the actors, directors and other people professionally involved in the theatre who have spared the time from busy working schedules to answer inquiries and reply to my correspondence - particularly to Sir John Gielgud, and Mary Andrews for the interest he showed in the work and the personal contribution of a tape-recorded interview. Sheila Fermoy of H. M. Tennent Ltd. was very kind in talking over the subject with me and providing practical assistance in the form of source material, photocopying facilities, and a corner to work in. Molly Sole of the Old Vic and the staff of the Script Department of the National Theatre also put up with the inconvenience of my presence in bustling office conditions over extended periods. To them all I wish to say an explicit thankyou and to the rest, who know who they are. No one is responsible for the errors in this thesis but myself, of course.



1. 'like the herald Mercury / new lighted on a heaven-kissing hill -'
(Hamlet, III.4.59)

CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
1. Shakespeare at the Old Vic : 1929 - 1931.	8
2. Richard II.	72
3. Hamlet.	139
4. Much Ado About Nothing.	243
5. King Lear.	320
6. The Tempest.	409
CONCLUSION	506
APPENDICES	
1: Chronological Table of Shakespearean Parts and Productions.	520
2: Cast Lists and the Opening Dates of Performances discussed in each Chapter (including the Theatres where the Openings took place).	523
BIBLIOGRAPHY	556

PLATES

	<u>Page</u>
1. Frontispiece: 'like the herald Mercury / New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill - ' (<u>Hamlet</u> , III.4.59).	
2. Richard II, Old Vic, 1929.	78
3. Richard II and Queen, Queen's, 1939.	99
4. Richard II and Queen, Lyric, Hammersmith, 1952.	127
5. Hamlet and Queen, Old Vic, 1930.	145
6. Hamlet, New, 1934.	158
7. Hamlet, Empire/Saint James's, New York, 1936.	175
8. Hamlet, Elsinore Castle, 1939.	206
9. Hamlet and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Haymarket, 1944.	218
10. Ground Plans of Mariano Andreu's set for <u>Much Ado About Nothing</u> .	251
11. The Masque, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1950.	273
12. Benedick, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1950.	287
13. Benedick and Beatrice, Phoenix, 1952.	301
14. King Lear, Old Vic, 1931.	325
15. King Lear, Old Vic, 1940.	331
16. King Lear, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1950.	378
17. King Lear, 1.1, 1.4, II.4, Theatre Royal, Brighton, 1955.	382
18. King Lear, IV.6, III.4, V.3.	384
19. Prospero, Old Vic, 1930, a woodcut by Powell Lloyd.	415
20. Prospero and Ariel, Old Vic, 1940.	426
21. Prospero and Ariel, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre/ Drury Lane, 1957.	435
22. Prospero and Ariel, National Theatre (Old Vic), 1974.	465

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I look at some of Sir John Gielgud's major Shakespearean roles and productions, offering a reconstruction and commentary based on promptbooks, sound recordings, reviews, programmes, interviews, correspondence, and designer's blue-prints. The first chapter examines Gielgud's seasons at the Old Vic from 1929 to 1931 – the period of his emergence as an actor of Shakespeare, although Gielgud had appeared in some of the plays beforehand. It was during these seasons, which contain so many of his Shakespeare débuts, that his special vocation was established. The next five chapters then each deal with a series of productions of one play that Gielgud initially appeared in at the Old Vic in which he has made an important contribution to theatre history. Productions are examined in chronological sequences within the chapters in order to highlight trends of interpretation and to suggest the way Gielgud's treatment of Shakespeare has altered and developed as he aged, became more experienced, and built on his playing in previous revivals. The continuities between productions and their differences of emphasis show how the process of stage interpretation has sometimes enriched the meaning and sometimes distorted the plays themselves. Thus the critical issues of textual analysis in Richard II, Hamlet, Much Ado About Nothing, King Lear and The Tempest receive attention as they are expressed through the history of Gielgud's performances and productions in the theatre.

Gielgud, of course, has made a much wider contribution to Shakespearean performance than is represented by these plays alone. Appendix One (A Chronological Table of Parts and Productions) displays a formidable list of titles revealing the full scope of his professional familiarity with the canon that receive small mention, if any, in this thesis – plays as diverse as Measure for Measure (1950), Twelfth Night

(1955), The Winter's Tale (1951), and Henry VIII (1958). Some of these productions lacked sufficient documentation, the promptbooks having disappeared and reviews never appearing because the newspapers were taken up with other matters such as the war with Hitler's Germany. In certain cases they went beyond the theatre into the different media of film and television, making comparisons difficult and posing intricate questions such as in what relationship does Orson Welles's film The Chimes At Midnight, in which Gielgud played Henry IV, stand to the stage plays Henry IV Parts One and Two. A third factor was that no long-term trends, as far as Gielgud's development was concerned, would be apparent in a single production however well documented and influential it was. One could not study the evolution of Angelo in Measure for Measure as one could with Gielgud's successive Lears, when he appeared only in the Peter Brook production of 1950. Moreover, a single production represents a single view of a play - that of the director - and where Gielgud was directed by someone else a range of viewpoints was required for the purposes of this study in order to establish an accumulative impression of his personal style. Gielgud's work in Richard II, Hamlet, Much Ado About Nothing, King Lear and The Tempest was in contact with a wider theatrical milieu over the years.

There is already a good deal of biographical literature which touches on Gielgud's Shakespeare. Ronald Hayman's biography, John Gielgud (1971), as well as offering an account of Gielgud's life, contains a useful appendix with a list of plays, production dates and roles chronicling the main events of Gielgud's career up to 1970.¹ Early Stages (1939) is an autobiography covering the earlier part of Gielgud's life up to his American Hamlet in 1936 and Gielgud has published three other volumes of reminiscences and comment on the theatre: Stage Directions (1963), Distinguished Company (1972) and An Actor and His Time (1979) based on a series of radio interviews with John Miller. The latter is especially rich in illustrations

of Gielgud in various parts and productions. Hallam Fordham's John Gielgud: An Actor's Biography in Pictures (1952) also presents a pictorial record with a brief commentary supplied by the author. Camera Studies (1938) is a compilation of photographs of Gielgud in roles and in person. Harcourt Williams's Four Years At The Old Vic (1935) and The Old Vic Saga (1949) cover Gielgud's years as a member of the repertory company of that theatre and are very enlightening from the point of view of the general conditions underlying the staging of plays at that time. For Gielgud's association with Granville-Barker, C. B. Purdom's Harley Granville Barker: Man of the Theatre, Dramatist and Scholar (1955) provides the details and reproduces some of the correspondence between them which I have made particular use of in my chapter on Richard II.

Much less has been written specifically on Gielgud's work in the theatre. Detailed critical discussion of his performances and productions tend to be found in the context of broader studies or in the pages of reviews for periodicals and newspapers. One such study is Richard Findlater's The Player Kings (1971) containing a chapter on Gielgud which discusses his technique as an actor and attempts a classification of his performances, relating Gielgud's work to professional forbears and contemporaries. This is a highly stimulating book in as much as it comes to grips with the conscientious craftsmanship of Gielgud and offers generalisations about acting as a technical discipline which aspire to more than the 'Gielgud has a golden voice and gave a sparkling performance' style beloved of some reviewers. The frequency with which this sort of statement occurs, whilst it casts doubt on the objectivity of the testimony, has received representation in this thesis, although I have tried to disassociate myself from it wherever it appears. One often regrets that, in the absence of other information, reviews occupy such a large place in the theatrical record in spite of the brilliant impressionistic insights of few of them.

Somewhat in the same vein as Findlater is Ronald Hayman's Techniques of Acting (1969), a general study which looks at the different approaches of actors in various media and offers some broad definitive observations on an art often referred to and seldom defined. Lewis Funke and John E. Booth have amply represented the point of view of the professional actor in Actors Talk About Acting (1962), a series of short reflective commentaries by actors and including an essay by Gielgud. A remarkably neglected aspect of Gielgud's work, his directing, makes Norman Marshall's The Producer and the Play (1975), with its references to Gielgud, all the more outstanding. One has to turn to studies concentrating on the small area of one production alone to find anything like it. Here Richard Sterne's John Gielgud Directs Richard Burton in Hamlet: A Journal of Rehearsals (1968) and William Redfield's Letters from An Actor (1967), both deal with the same production. The disregard of Gielgud's directing, overshadowed by his reputation as an actor and his habit of acting and directing at one and the same time, is something that this thesis attempts to rectify. There is no broad study devoted exclusively to Gielgud's Shakespeare, let alone his direction of plays.

Perhaps the best introduction to Gielgud the Shakespearean is his own 'Ages of Man' recital recorded for Philips on two long playing albums: The Ages of Man and One Man in His Time. This selection of extracts from roles played throughout his career, and some which he never attempted on the stage, features Gielgud the actor and director in a pure Shakespeare repertoire including some of the Sonnets. Gielgud, as Richard Bebb has observed, 'is the first major actor whose career is fully covered by recordings' and I have drawn especially freely on this source of information to stimulate discussion of the theatre productions.² J. C. Trewin chronicles briefly Gielgud's Shakespeare performances and productions in Shakespeare on the English Stage: 1900-1964 (1964) and thoroughly sets

them in their immediate context alongside other productions of their period, though the scope of his survey precludes much detail. Trewin's and A. C. Sprague's Shakespeare's Plays Today (1970) is, on the other hand, a highly detailed examination of the playing traditions and habits of interpretation which have grown up around the plays and traces Gielgud's influence on theatre custom. A. C. Sprague's Shakespeare and The Actors (1948) follows the historical development of the stage business actors have habitually used to interpret Shakespeare.

All these works belong to the larger study of Shakespeare in performance and like the accounts of the history of a single play (Dennis Bartholomeusz's Macbeth and the Players (1969) or the work of Marvin Rosenberg on the tragedies for example) tell us more about the playwright than the thespian. Gielgud's work receives mention, but it is not treated in a systematic way. Unpublished dissertations such as A. J. Harris's 'King Lear in the Theatre: A Study of the Play through the Performances of Garrick, Kean, Macready, Irving, Gielgud, and Scofield' (Ph.D., 1966), J. F. Cox's 'Much Ado About Nothing in the English Theatre: 1660-1920' (Ph.D., 1976), R. L. O'Connell's 'Richard II: 1800 - 1920' (Ph.D., 1958) and Pamela Mason's 'Much Ado About Nothing at Stratford: 1949 - 1976' (M.A., 1976) are, as their titles suggest, also narrowly focussed from the point of view of Gielgud. Rosamond Gilder's John Gielgud's Hamlet: A Record of Performance with the Hamlet Tradition by John Gielgud (1937) is a unique book-length reconstruction of one of Gielgud's major roles: his 1936 Hamlet. In the realm of textual criticism Granville Barker's Prefaces to Shakespeare (1958) have been useful, particularly for the indirect insights they provide into Gielgud's stage practice. All references to Shakespeare's plays are, for the sake of convenience, taken from William Shakespeare: the Complete Works edited by Peter Alexander.

Trying as far as possible to adopt the viewpoint of the completely

attentive spectator - who of course belongs in a category with unicorns and chimeras - I have reversed the customary stage left and stage right of the promptbooks in favour of the audience. In favour to the reader I have avoided the use of theatrical jargon and I ask him only to remember that assemblies are the two areas in front and on either side of the proscenium opening at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

1. Full references to all works cited are given in the bibliography.
2. 'The Voice of John Gielgud: Richard Bebb considers and compares Recordings of Performances', Typescript of a B.B.C. Radio Broadcast.

CHAPTER ONE

SHAKESPEARE AT THE OLD VIC 1929 - 1931

When John Gielgud went to take up an appointment as an actor at the Old Vic in 1929 he was twenty-five years of age. He had already achieved some recognition in the West End in modern roles such as Nicky Lancaster in Noel Coward's play The Vortex (Little, 1925) and Lewis Dodd in The Constant Nymph (New, 1926). He had acquired valuable experience in Chekhov and also in Shakespeare. There had been minor parts for him in The Tempest (Ferdinand, Savoy, 1926), Othello (Cassio, Apollo, 1927), Romeo and Juliet (Paris, R.A.D.A., 1924) and Henry V (Herald, Old Vic, 1921). He had been one of the servants who silently hold Gloucester's chair in the blinding scene of King Lear. This was the third 'walk on' role in a Shakespearean play he had had at the Old Vic while still an unpaid student. He had also appeared as Rosencrantz (Court, 1926) and as a supernumerary in Hamlet (Old Vic, 1921). In addition to this, he had tackled at least one of the leading tragic parts when he was given the opportunity to play Romeo for Sir Barry Jackson - a performance which was not well received (Regent, 1924). The Birmingham Post (R.E.R., 24.5.1924) wrote,

Mr. John Gielgud as Romeo had a fine romantic appearance and a beautiful voice, but he cannot be compared for a moment to Mr. Ion Swinley ... With all his great natural advantages, among them histrionic instinct, his Romeo was all in one tone, with no sudden revelations of subtle meanings such as Juliet gave.

But hitherto there was no special reason for associating the name of Gielgud with the classical tradition of Shakespearean acting other than through his family connections. Two seasons at the Old Vic were to change

all that and establish him as one of the foremost members of his profession. In this comparatively short period he attempted most of the great tragic roles including a Hamlet which won the acclaim of James Agate who described it as

the highwatermark of English Shakespearean
acting of our time (Sunday Times, 1.6.1930). ¹

There was plenty of opportunity for experiment at the Old Vic. The repertory system made a wide range of parts available and diminished the likelihood of typecasting. With a set company of players, practical necessities made it impossible to ensure that roles were tailor made to fit individual personalities. Thus Gielgud was expected to impersonate characters like King Lear and the elder Mark Anthony who would normally have been regarded as quite beyond his range. The busy schedule and severe economy that was kept did not permit much attention to detail and rather encouraged an actor to concentrate on broad effects than on the intricate subtleties of an elaborate interpretation. Any shortcomings of histrionic technique were inclined to be overlooked in the exigencies of the moment that required a show to be mounted speedily. This often led to uneven performances, but it also created an atmosphere in which a young actor could explore creative possibilities without having to stake his entire future on the outcome. Gielgud described the sense of freedom he felt to John Miller :

There were hardly any notices because the top critics didn't come. It was rather a good thing. At the Vic you could sort of try your wings, you know, without being sure that you'd get-eh-slating or praise the next day so our egos were not all that affected by the critics ... we did them {the plays} so quickly you see. We did about eight a season. We only played about thirteen performances

because there was the opera and the ballet on other nights and so we'd be rehearsing one play and playing another and we'd only give about thirteen performances of each play so it was very important to get a slant on how we wanted to do it and whip it on very quickly - as quickly as possible - and sometimes the results were very exciting from that point of view. They were very naturally unfinished and-um-not perfect in anyway. It was a marvellous training ground.²

Plays would run for three weeks, averaging about fifteen performances, (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights at 7.30 plus Thursday and alternate Saturday matinées at 2.00). For the second season (September 1930 - April 1931) performances ran later, 7.45 evenings and 2.30 matinées, and their number was increased to an average of twenty-eight per play with five evening presentations and two matinées a week. The increased work load coincided with the acquisition of a second stage at Sadler's Wells (6.1.1931), making it possible for the Shakespeare company to alternate with the opera company at the two theatres. A play would be given for a fortnight in each theatre. There was a maximum of twelve productions a season.

Salaries were small. A leading man at the Old Vic expected to earn ten pounds a week whereas in the West End he could earn anything from fifty pounds and upwards. This meant that the sort of actors who were attracted to the Old Vic tended to be either young and at the outset of their careers, eager to acquire experience in a classical repertoire and extend their range, or older players, who had perhaps played in the provinces, but who had largely grown up with the theatre itself. Established 'star' actors were usually excluded. A survey of the companies of the two seasons Gielgud was playing there illustrates the bias towards youth (See Appendix Two). Amongst the members were Gyles Isham, who had recently been playing with the Oxford University Dramatic Society where he had performed a notable

Hamlet; Adèle Dixon, a graduate who specialised in romantic female leads; Richard Riddle, son of the actor Henry Ainley, who was coming to take up his first professional appointment; Martita Hunt, a young character actress who had played in Three Sisters and The Doll's House, and Henry Wolston and Brember Wills, who were two of the maturer members of the company. The next season saw the arrival of Anthony Hawtrey, Olive Terry, Joan Harben and Valentine Dyll, all the sons and daughters of actors; Ralph Richardson from the Birmingham Repertory Theatre; and Dorothy Green, a leading lady who had trained in the provinces under Frank Benson.

Productions were restricted in scope by limited rehearsal time and shoe-string budgeting. A play was usually prepared in three weeks and the availability of the stage was halved by the opera company's rehearsal requirements. The sum that could be spent on each production was twenty pounds. This led to much improvisation and borrowing of resources with free adaptation of costumes and sets. The structure of the set for Verdi's opera Aida was used for the last act of The Tempest, for instance. Gielgud's mother donated some handkerchiefs to the leading characters in Much Ado About Nothing which she had embroidered herself. Wardrobe facilities were of a standardized kind with ruffs and farthingales for the Elizabethan period and togas with pink borders for classical Rome. The productions were all designed to fit a picture-frame stage with a horseshoe shaped auditorium that had a high balcony. There were two proscenium doors, one in either side of the arch, and a small apron for front scenes. The orchestra pit separated the players from the audience and this had a single flight of wooden steps, situated at one side, to connect it with the stage. Later, another was added. The stage itself was unraked. Lighting was complicated by the difference of sight lines between balcony and stalls - those who looked down on the play requiring much more light to see by than

those below. Plays were mounted, with the minimum use of scenery and props, in a formalized style characterized by directness, simplicity and an absence of realistic detail that placed the emphasis squarely upon the acting. Changes of locality were achieved through suggestion by the movement of the curtain and the placing of some significant object such as a bunched canvas to create the impression of a tree trunk in a wood or a throne to conjure up the idea of a palace. Sets tended to be permanent and non-literal so that their vagueness enhanced their flexibility. The action moved freely and continuously without interpolations or elaborate business. There was quite often only one ten minute interval and cutting was light. The stress was on clarity, pace and width of emotional appeal rather than on interpretative subtlety.

The audiences that came to the plays were not comprised of the casual, middle-class playgoers who patronized many of the other major theatres. There was a solid core of regular attenders who lived locally in the East of London and identified themselves with the aims and objectives of the Old Vic. Their allegiance was grounded in a tradition that began with the take-over of the premises in 1880 by Emma Cons, the present manager Lilian Bayliss's aunt, who had intended to promote the welfare of the working-class poor in that area by offering them respectable variety entertainment and non-alcoholic beverages at nominal prices. She had handed on this parochial heritage of Victorian philanthropy to her niece who, in turn, had continued the good work through regular addresses to her clientele, in person from the stage, or through such organs as The Old Vic Magazine (a monthly periodical containing bulletins of the theatre's activities), the maintenance of ticket prices at a low level and the organization of such functions as the Twelfth Night party in which a cake was cut and shared

ceremonially amongst staff and patrons. At the end of the evening, the actors, who were expected to attend, would join hands with the audience across the footlights to sing 'Auld Lang Syne'. Such associated activities all served to underwrite the strong sense of corporate identity which was created when the audience came together to watch a play. The atmosphere on these occasions was lively and informal. Smoking was permitted in the auditorium and casual dress was worn. Lantern slides were projected onto the safety curtain during the interval. Applause often occurred while the play was in progress to greet the entrances and exits of a favourite player as well as being demonstrative at the end of a performance.

This is not to say that the audiences were always hospitably receptive, for they were also inclined to be, on occasions, suspicious of new performers who had yet to prove themselves on the Old Vic stage, however many times they had done so elsewhere, and generally resentful of innovation. Harcourt Williams, who had taken up his appointment as the company's new director at the same time as Gielgud had taken up his appointment, received a series of anonymous letters denouncing him and the changes that he was attempting to introduce into the productions. Tyrone Guthrie would later experience the same animosity. They were equally demonstrative when it came to expressing their dislike of something. But their tastes were, on the whole, governed by what the Old Vic had to offer and they owed no allegiance to the heavy, sumptuous, spectacular tradition of Shakespearean presentations exemplified by Irving and Tree. To this core of supporters descended from the original artisans and costermongers to which the Old Vic, under Emma Cons, had stood as a kind of welfare institution, were being added in increasing numbers shopkeepers, teachers and white-collar workers who were all coming across the Waterloo Bridge in search of cheap, cultural entertainment. By the time Gielgud had joined,

the Old Vic was well on the way towards becoming a fashionable theatre in the mainstream of Shakespearean production as illustrated by the narrowing of the repertoire to more manageable proportions, the expansion of rehearsals and the gradual increase in actors' salaries. Still it had not yet completely lost touch with its distinctive background and this situation gave theatrical events there their peculiar vitality.

When Harcourt Williams became the new director he had definite ideas about the production of Shakespeare that he intended to put into practice. Williams had not much experience of direction - Lilian Bayliss seems to have chosen him on the strength of some children's Christmas plays he had done for his wife, Jean Sterling Mackinlay, a singer and diseuse - but he had had plenty of acting experience with Benson and at the Lyceum and would occasionally stand in to take parts in the plays he directed during his four years at the Old Vic, such as Prospero and Brutus. He was well acquainted, therefore, with the traditions of the actor managers. Yet his own philosophy of direction was derived from the theories of Granville-Barker whom he knew personally and had worked with. Many of Williams's productions were, as Gielgud's would be later on, direct attempts to put Granville-Barker's Prefaces to Shakespeare into action. Although Barker's Prefaces were not completed until 1958 in a posthumous two-volume edition, they started to become available in 1923 when they first began to appear individually in print. Williams read some of them in manuscript and supplemented his knowledge in correspondence and conversation with the author. Barker's ideas had already achieved some currency through the historic productions of Twelfth Night, The Winter's Tale (1912) and A Midsummer Night's Dream (1914) he had given at the Savoy. The stage-centred approach of his criticism, based to a large extent on his experience as a director, had a natural appeal to actors and directors generally. In particular, Williams was influenced by Barker's attitudes towards décor

which took full account of Elizabethan fashions in the mounting of historical plays. Barker stresses that the Elizabethan consciousness tended to conceive of historical figures from other epochs in the clothes which they wore themselves, with perhaps the addition of some recognizable symbolic property like a laurel wreath or a purple cloak to create the impression of a different era, and he could point to the references in Shakespeare's plays to the hats and doublets of the Romans and Cleopatra's lace in support of this contention. Eschewing archaeological accuracy in his productions, which was in any case beyond the means of the Old Vic, Williams restored many of the plays to their Elizabethan context.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, which went back to Barker's production for inspiration, was conceived in the terms of a Jacobean masque. Anthony and Cleopatra was performed in the costumes of the Renaissance in the manner of Paul Veronese's paintings. Julius Caesar would have been in Elizabethan dress too, but here Williams was defeated by wardrobe facilities and had to make use instead of conventional togas. He followed Barker also in using functional, symbolic settings that were freely adaptable to various localities and which were designed to enhance a mood and increase the range of expression of the players rather than create the illusion of an independent environment beyond the proscenium. The Forest of Arden in As You Like It, on Gielgud's suggestion, was organised around the basic shape of a triangle with the addition of small rostrums and tree trunks and a back-drop depicting a pastoral landscape. 'A tastefully unpretentious setting' declared The Stage (12.2.1930). The wood near Athens, in A Midsummer Night's Dream, was represented by thick, bunched curtains hanging from above. In the middle of the wood a flight of green steps led nowhere but provided the players with many opportunities for clambering and leaping. In front of these steps was a horseshoe-shaped rostrum which was the special demesne of Puck, who frequently ran along it when travelling on errands for Gielgud's

Oberon. Williams was fond of distinguishing supernatural characters in this way (he had a special bent for fantasy as was demonstrated by his love of children's fairy stories) and he employed a similar device in The Tempest to introduce Ariel. Prospero's island was executed in the style of The Arabian Nights, though the ship-wrecked courtiers wore Elizabethan dress, and there was a red, Japanese bridge as a centre piece for the stage. Ariel made many of his chief entrances and exits over this bridge which was intended to span the gulf between the terrestrial and supernatural worlds.

In tragedy as well, formal, austere settings were chosen such as the sombre pillar in Macbeth with a staircase winding around it to the left and a gloomy recess, behind, on an upper level. This was based on a design of Gordon Craig's for the sleep walking scene. Williams, however, devised it as a permanent fixture. The placing of a scarlet throne in Macbeth's scene with the two murderers suddenly lit up the shadowy tableau (Sunday Times, 23.3.1930). The first part of King Lear, up until the heath scenes, was done in black velvet. Some of Williams's most notable effects were indeed achieved through the imaginative arrangement of stepped rostrums and curtain hangings of various kinds which were advantageous also in being readily available and economical. His desire to bring the action forward led to various temporary modifications of the stage like the raked platform that was introduced into Hamlet or the extension to the apron, causing it to stretch out over the orchestra pit, in Julius Caesar. Moreover, the pit itself was often used for entrances and exits via the steps that connected it with the main stage. One of the first things the director insisted on during the move to Sadler's Wells was the installation of two curved staircases that descended from either side of the apron into

the orchestra. In Richard II a sense of rising terraces was achieved by the employment of a false stage and the orchestra steps to suggest the battlements of a castle. The sight of spears and helmets just above the rim of the pit would have created the impression of massed armies without the need to actually represent their numbers.

Harcourt Williams shared Granville-Barker's opposition to the elaborate pieces of business and artificial mannerisms that had slowly been gathering around Shakespearean playing after over two centuries of continuous performance. In this respect, his efforts constituted a clearing-away operation in which the excrescences of production were rejected in favour of a return to the text and the essential elements of stagecraft. Habits of clipped pronunciation were abolished. The old actors' mannerism of pronouncing 'me' for 'my' was strongly discouraged. The recording of Richard III's opening soliloquy by Irving illustrates the practice in use (Great Actors of The Past, Argo SW 510). Irving was renowned for his quirky, clipped style of speech. Williams fostered precision in speech and threw out much of the time-honoured business that actors had used to point their lines. It was customary, for instance, for Portia to speak the quality of mercy speech standing up. However, when Martita Hunt played the part she sat at a table and spoke in a subdued, conversational tone. The Era (16.10.1929) remarked on her curious delivery which 'gave one the impression that it was an argument in a drawing room rather than a counsel's speech for the defence in a court of law'. Reviewers tended to regard this as one of the anomalies of the production yet it is notable that in Gielgud's second production of The Merchant of Venice (Queen's, 1938), the one in which he played Shylock, Portia sat in a chair of justice on a dais for the trial scene while the Duke looked on from a subordinate position (Stage, 28.4.1938).

Along with the discarding of complicated gestures and actions and the simplification of others came the invention of fresh business that was designed to clarify and naturalize the dramatic situations without impeding the progression of the narrative. In the second scene of Henry IV Part One the director had Prince Hal discovered in bed, asleep, with Falstaff waking him up and serving breakfast. Afterwards, Poins helped himself to scraps from the Prince's trencher. In the first court scene of Hamlet the Queen sat on a higher level, at one remove from her son, doing her sewing while Claudius swept in below in a slouched hat and riding gloves, having just come back from a hunting expedition. He launched immediately into his address to the court. Some of this sounds as if it was introduced with insufficient regard to context. In the case of Falstaff's awakening of Hal, his first remark, 'Now Hal, what time of day is it, lad?' (1.2.1), fits more easily into the mouth of a speaker who has himself been sleeping and this is borne out by the Prince's subsequent allusions to a dissolute character whose irregular life causes him to sleep at unusual times, but the main point rests, not on the appropriateness of the business, but on the fact that it was new and exceptional and that it induced audiences to look upon familiar episodes from a different angle. What was happening was that the emphasis was changing from the repetition of time-worn practices which carried with them their own aura of sanctity and respectability to a search for individual creative opportunities and exclusive interpretation. Williams encouraged his actors to invent business for themselves and think independently about their parts. Unlike his predecessors, Ben Greet and Robert Atkins, who had fiery temperaments and used autocratic methods, he welcomed creative suggestions and was willing to delegate some of the responsibility of direction to the more capable members of the company. This was an important factor in Gielgud's artistic development because it allowed him to take advantage of the freedom Williams offered to practice direction on a small scale. Not only did he submit stage-designs which

were afterwards accepted like the Forest in As You Like It and the sofa and window setting for a scene in Coleman's The Jealous Wife and have a say in the casting of the plays, he was also allowed to manage the other actors in specific episodes and exercise a controlling influence over aspects of a production's conception. The choice to begin the second season with Henry IV Part One was provisionally Gielgud's own and in the short comic scene in Anthony and Cleopatra between the Queen and her messenger, played by Harcourt Williams himself (II.5), Gielgud was allowed to cast a critical eye over the proceedings (Four Years At The Old Vic, p.95).

Harcourt Williams's most radical debt to Barker, and certainly the most striking feature of his earlier productions if the reviews are anything to go by, was his preoccupation with pace. Many of his other tactics as a director, such as the elimination of business, the minimal scenic changes, the division of stage space with curtains, and the alternation of full and front scenes were inclined to speed up the playing indirectly. So too was his preference for reducing the significance of age in the characterization of the older parts in Shakespearean plays evinced in Martita Hunt's interpretation of the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet, Brember Wills's Friar Laurence (whose robust and buoyant humour undercut the gravity of his moralizing), Joan Harben's young and sprightly Olivia, Gyles Isham's Horatio, and Gielgud's Antonio, Prospero, and Hamlet. It was true that practical limitations had a lot to do with the formation of such a policy. Williams's young company naturally tended to rejuvenate the older parts that they took on. But this did, in addition, reflect a genuine concern to rescue certain roles from the exaggerations that had been perpetrated by a generation of players who either specialized in ageing character parts or who held on to leading roles long after they were too

old to play them properly. All these factors militated together to get the presentations moving along faster. Moreover, Harcourt Williams believed, with William Poel, that lightness of stress and a continuously fluent elocution were better adapted to the realization of the meaning and the musicality of Shakespeare's language. It was possible, he held, to preserve intelligibility whilst rejecting the ponderous emphases, pauses and vocal underscoring of the pentameter beat that characterized the Victorian, elocutionary style of delivery.

With this regard, the decision to present Romeo and Juliet to mark the new company's début was a significant one. In that play the Chorus refers to 'the two hours' traffic of our stage' (Prologue,12) and the course of the tragedy of the lovers is likened to the passage of a lightning bolt through the sky (II.2.119). It became clear at the first rehearsal that Harcourt Williams wanted to capture this feeling of passionate impetuosity in the treatment of the dialogue. Eric Philips, a company member, related what happened:

A young actor whose name I have forgotten
(Leslie Young) strolled across the floor
in a somewhat leisurely manner and spoke the
first line of the play.

Gregory, o' my word, we'll not carry coals!

Harcourt Williams raised his hand, and beat
on the table with a clenched fist: 'No!' he
roared. 'Not like that! This is Italy -
the hot, passionate South. You are a tempestuous
Latin character. You must convey that to the

audience the moment the curtain rises.
 And ladies and gentlemen, please -
 all of you - right through this play
 I want pace - pace - pace!' (Listener,
 14.2.1957).

Pace is what he eventually got, but it was unfortunately inclined to leave the sense behind as may be inferred from the comments of reviewers:

England won another world's speed record on Saturday night, when, at the Old Vic, Shakespearean blank verse was spoken faster than ever before. (Evening News, 16.9.1929).

The headline used by The Daily Sketch (16.9.1929) was 'Undiluted Shakespeare in High Speed Romeo and Juliet'. In his article itself the reviewer stated that he had come away with the opinion that 'express speed is the new order at the Old Vic'. The Daily Mail (16.9.1929) reported that 'the play was rattled through. The acting had been jazzed up, and instead of slow-spoken tragedy there was pace.' The Evening Standard (16.9.1929) attributed the hasty, slovenly mismanagement of the poetry to the fullness of the text. Needing to get through the play in the allotted amount of time, the actors had no choice but to 'gabble'. 'Gabbling', of course, was the term bandied about most frequently by reviewers of Granville-Barker's innovative productions at the Savoy and

Harcourt Williams could derive some consolation from the fact that the common reaction amongst those who were unused to speaking that was fast rather than awkwardly rushed was to say that words were being gabbled. As Granville-Barker pointed out at the time, it did not necessarily follow that because lines were delivered quickly they were therefore being delivered inarticulately. Was it possible that the listeners nourished on a diet of sluggish and deliberate recitations were more at fault than the speakers? No doubt there was an element of truth in this. Ben Greet, Robert Atkins, and Andrew Leigh were the immediate predecessors of Harcourt Williams and they had all at one time during their administration been accused of slurring over the verse because of their concern for speed. Yet successive audiences were gradually becoming acclimatized to an increasing rate of utterance. Shakespearean verse speaking was becoming progressively faster during the first half of the century since the original pioneering productions of William Poel had established the trend. Indeed, if one listens now to Gielgud's earliest recorded recital made while he was still working at the Old Vic, then this sounds rather slow and mannered by contemporary standards (Linguaphone Shakespeare Series, 1930). Other reviewers of Romeo and Juliet displayed more discrimination in their judgement. There were some, like the critics for The Observer (15.9.1929) and The Irish Independent (16.9.1929), who seem to have been not at all bothered by the brisk unfolding of the performance nor do they show in their writing any awareness of new and unprecedented departures from an accepted pattern. There are others like the reviewer of The Morning Post (16.9.1929) who attempt to distinguish between the opening which was set 'a little too fast', Gyles Isham's Mercutio 'rattling through' his Queen Mab speech 'with a good deal more parade of himself than information for us about Queen Mab', and the more evenly balanced

later sections. This reviewer added that in spite of everything the play still lasted three hours. However, only one critic explicitly made the link between the swiftness of the speaking and the lightning swiftness of the tragedy which was Harcourt Williams's main point (Inquirer, 21.9.1929). When the evidence from reviews is backed up by the director's own admission that the opening scene between the two servants may have been too quick, the conclusion seems reasonable that he had tried to impose too rigorously a vocal style upon a company that was not used to having to meet his requirements (Four Years At The Old Vic, p.56). Harcourt Williams never went back on his commitment to getting his actors to speak quickly and lightly with the minimum number of pauses and stresses, but he learnt to apply his policy with more efficiency as the season developed just as the actors, with practice, were better able to respond to his demands. Thus the early productions, Romeo and Juliet and The Merchant of Venice, were marred to some extent by haste with occasional relapses later on. Richard II (October, 1929), the fourth production of the season, was a turning point where execution at last began to realize intention and Gielgud's own acting potential blossomed.

There were early indications to show that, in the part of Romeo, Gielgud perhaps found it easier to adjust to his director's coaching than some of his fellow players did. The Era (18.9.1929) picked him out.

He has a feeling for verse and he can
modulate his pace - and keep the pace -
without losing the rhythm.

Unrelieved speed can be as monotonous as slow and hesitant speaking. It was this modulation of pace that the revival was generally lacking in. The Daily Express (16.9.1929), having praised 'the magnificent intensity' of the actor's voice, went on to contrast it with 'the slightly pantomimic fairy-queen intonation affected by some members of the company'.

It was said that Gielgud's Romeo had improved since he appeared in Barry Jackson's production. Nevertheless, the criticism of monotony that was levelled at his first portrayal was made again by The Daily Telegraph (16.9.1929). Gielgud was here described as a very personable and graceful Romeo with pleasing accents that did on occasions tend to some sameness of inflection. The actor possibly relied too much on the musical, singing strain of his voice. His youth and good looks made him appealing to The Evening Standard (16.9.1929), The Daily Herald (16.9.1929) and The Irish Independent (16.9.1929). Along with verbal eloquence and a fresh, romantic appearance he seemed to possess a certain physical grace (Daily Telegraph, 16.9.1929). But there were indications that the performance he gave was serviceable rather than superlative. The Morning Post (16.9.1929) called him 'manly', 'sympathetic' and 'a regular fellow' though it still went on to find flaws. The Daily Herald (16.9.1929) thought that he was lacking in imagination. The Times (16.9.1929), on the other hand, wrote

There were times when he let himself become too much the creature of reflection, failing to give rein to the instinct of the moment with the unreflecting impulse which distinguishes Romeos from Hamlets.

This suggests traces of inhibition as well as anticipating the cerebral quality with which he would invest his Hamlet. Harcourt Williams's own assessment agreed.

John Gielgud in Romeo gave what was, I suppose, the least interesting performance of his two years at the Old Vic. He certainly gave little hint of the powers to come, albeit it was a thoughtful, well-graced performance, and he spoke it beautifully. But he never touched the last scenes. He failed to bring off the distracted boy jolted into full manhood, the ecstasy, too, of the last moments transcending death escaped him.

(Four Years At The Old Vic, p.28)

It appears then that Gielgud's Romeo was pitched too much on one level. His portrayal did not do justice to the development of Shakespeare's character and failed to reach the climaxes. The requisite spontaneity of feeling was submerged in an introspective reading that, in its preoccupation with the beauty of language, overlooked emotional sincerity.

Adèle Dixon's Juliet was radiant and animated according to The Daily News (16.9.1929) and combined simple beauty with sophistication (Era, 18.9.1929). She did not, as so often happens, overshadow her partner. The modernism that was detected in her performance by some critics was, in part, a reflection upon her fluent articulation as it had been encouraged by Harcourt Williams (Evening Standard, 16.9.1929). The Evening News (16.9.1929) said that the balcony scene had no repose because the actress refused to 'hesitate or contemplate'. The Times (16.9.1929), probably driving at the same thing, found a vein of realism in her interpretation that was felt to be opposed to the poetry and hinted that there was no great rapport between the two leading players. Credit was given to her pathos:

It was in the tradition which makes of Juliet a very human girl, emphasises her playfulness and seductiveness, and may leave us grieved that a girl so charming and so sensible should have been born to purblind parents. Working on this tradition Miss Dixon succeeded in avoiding many of its pitfalls. Her Juliet was fully alive, now archly mocking, petulant or in a scolding humour, now eager, expectant, wondering.

But Miss Dixon might have done even better had she played Juliet less realistically and been ready to sacrifice some human touches in order to retain the character on the poetical plane which the play demands. Indeed, Mr. Gielgud's Romeo was worthy of a less modern Juliet.

Special features of the production were the white backcloth which reminded one reviewer of a cinema screen. His review was entitled, again with a glance at the production's velocity, 'Shakespeare with a talkie touch. Cinema effect at opening of Old Vic Season'. That was at least an original slant on a generally discussed topic! The staging of the ball scene also attracted attention because of the continued laughing and talking of the guests in the background actually during the lovers' encounter (Era, 18.9.1929). The reviewer would have preferred a lull at this point. Then there was the brilliant lighting to create the idea of blazing sunshine in the outdoor scenes (perhaps accentuated by the white backcloth) and the sudden, poignant intrusion of light and colour into Juliet's darkened bedroom when she is mistaken for dead. The Daily Sketch (16.9.1929) decided that this was helped by the fussiness of Eric Adeney's Old Capulet. And finally, the difficulties of tableau in the long and complicated tomb scene. Gielgud would come up against similar problems in his staging of the scene in 1935 at the New Theatre. The enthusiasm of the audience on the first night of the new season was often touched upon peripherally.

The next production was The Merchant of Venice, given in a setting of arches, with steps forming a low terrace at the back. This was a permanent structure of green and gold with slight modifications introduced to suggest a change of place. The reception it received was similar to that given to Romeo and Juliet and the same complaints were made of gabbling and inaudibility together with closely related impressions of a misplaced

naturalism and the translation of the poetry into flattened, every day prose.³ Little remains of Gielgud's performance as Antonio, the reviewers mainly being preoccupied with Martita Hunt's Portia, wearing apricot satin and pearls in Belmont and a red lawyer's gown in the court room at Venice, and the rather tame Shylock of Brember Wills. 'This Shylock's spiritual home is Wardour Street and not Venice' said The Daily News (8.10.1929) looking for a larger, more awe-inspiring persona. Brember Wills seems to have been aiming at a sordid, ignoble, philistine character who was a fit butt for comedy along the same lines as Gielgud's own later study, The Daily Herald (8.10.1929), more approving than most, called him 'a real person ... a greedy, ignorant old man with only financial talents'. What could be said in favour of this Shylock, as it was subsequently said in defence of Gielgud's, was that he did not overbalance the play: if the requisite force was missing, Portia assumed much of the grandeur that Shylock had renounced. From what the reviews do say about Gielgud's portrayal one forms the notion that it was slightly restrained. Granville-Barker's verdict in a letter to Harcourt Williams was 'good, if a little timid' although he only saw half of the play from the Bassanio casket scene onwards (5.11.1929, Four Years At The Old Vic, p.41). Save for the playing down of the melancholy of the man there are no singularities to suggest that anything more than a passable reading was given. A number of articles did question the advisability of his casting which demonstrates Gielgud's standing as a romantic lead.⁴ In many ways Bassanio or Lorenzo were considered to be more suitable vehicles for his talent. Yet Harcourt Williams had the requirements of repertory casting to think about. Gyles Isham was Bassanio and this would have meant that his relationship with the rich merchant was seen as the comradeship of two young contemporaries. Antonio is often played as an older man with a paternal affection for a youthful protégé.

After Richard II, (discussed on pp. 75 - 94) which secured Gielgud's first personal success in the title role, the tide of critical opinion continued to turn with A Midsummer Night's Dream (December, 1929). In a programme note the director laid out his strategy:

John Masefield has said that Shakespeare's imagination conceived Athens as an English town, and that in this play he set himself free to tell his love for the earth of England. Elizabethan costumes will therefore be worn, with the addition of Greek apparel such as players might have adopted. The music will be the folk tunes arranged by Cecil Sharp for H. Granville-Barker's production.

Harcourt Williams was sailing on dangerous waters here in spite of the fact that Granville-Barker had already broken the ice for him and provided a model for the later production. A Midsummer Night's Dream had a long history of operatic playing traditions behind it and had been a favourite with Victorian and Edwardian actor managers. Gauze transparencies, gossamer-winged fairies and a good deal of singing and musical accompaniment, preferably by Mendelssohn, were firmly established adjuncts of the text. The scene of the play-within-a-play had inherited a fund of jokes and incidental business invented by stage comedians. It was Williams's intention to sweep away all this and begin afresh. He had, however, no way of knowing what the public reaction would be.

The three main groups of characters in the play, the lovers, the mechanicals, and the fairies, each wore distinctive dress. The costumes of the lovers were based on paintings by Paul Veronese. The mechanicals were dressed as English yokels. (Bottom had a broad regional accent.) The fairies wore fantastically Jacobean costumes derived from the masque designs of Inigo Jones. As Oberon, Gielgud wore Elizabethan breeches and a spidery, diadem, head dress. He altered his skin colour with make-up. He wore masque costume again in 1944 when he played Oberon for a second time at the Hay-

market, under Nevill Coghill's direction. The malevolent asperity of his interpretation there was very different to the reading he gave at the Old Vic on this occasion. Leslie French came to join the company to play Puck. He had had special training in singing and dancing and, in a baggy clown's uniform and a frizzy wig that made him resemble Donald Calthrop's Puck in Granville-Barker's production, he at once created a close interplay with Oberon. He and Gielgud devised one notable piece of comic business with Puck's exit lines

I go, I go; look how I go,
Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow. (III.2.100)

When Puck said this Oberon was not paying sufficient attention and his messenger's tone became facetiously insistent demanding that he should be watched. The business is mentioned in The Daily News (E.A. Baughan, 10.12.1929) where the actor is criticised for raising a laugh 'as if he were Malvolio' and in J.C. Trewin's Going to Shakespeare (p. 104) where his intonation is described as that of 'a spoilt child'. It was still being used in the open air production at Regent's Park (May, 1979). The attendants of the fairy Queen had blue worsted hair and were girl pupils of the Ginner-Mawer School. The hair of Adèle Dixon's Titania, no doubt with a further allusion to the Savoy production and its notorious golden fairies, was gilded; Theseus wore a burlesque, plumed helmet. It is not clear how Flute's red braces fitted into this general scheme although, quite probably, Harcourt Williams was content to admit one aberration for the sake of a joke in the Pyramus and Thisbe interlude in which they were accidentally revealed.

The formal setting, with its steps, curtain tree trunks, and horseshoe rostrum, based on a suggestion of Gordon Craig's, was placed against a backdrop of a moonlit, Warwickshire Forest scene. The non-representational elements

in the décor were especially perplexing to critics, in particular the obtrusive, central staircase. The Morning Post (S.R.L., 10.12.1929) considered that no attempt at realism or supernaturalism had been made. Referring to 'pillars for trees' and 'a flight of green stairs' that was Titania's bower, the writer decided that the style of the design was a mistake, if he conceded that the blending of colours was good and the whole 'far better than in the Barker revival'. Ivor Brown did not approve of what he called 'a sharp, platform-hillock' because of its selfconscious modernism and because the players seemed uncomfortable on it though he added that it was ingeniously used (Observer, 15.12.1929). The Daily Telegraph's (W.A. Darlington, 10.12.1929) comments throw light on the practical function to which this property was put. There were 'curtains with flights of steps from which players climb and leap with the agility of chamois'. The effect, the reviewer decided, was mannered but attractive. From this it may be gathered that the stairs served to establish the uneven, labyrinthine terrain of the dark wood where the lovers stumbled 'Over hill, over dale,/ Thorough bush, thorough brier,' (II.1.2), their movements contrasting with the swiftness and grace of the fairies' movements along the horseshoe rostrum and in their native habitat.

The replacement of Mendelssohn with Cecil Sharp's arrangements of folk melodies was another freely debated point. More was at stake than just the relative merits of different types of accompaniment. Mendelssohn's incidental music for A Midsummer Night's Dream had come to symbolize an entire mode of presentation characterized by sumptuous, operatic display and pantomimic transformations. Titania's lullaby has, in fact, been arranged by the composer in oratorio fashion. The luscious richness of the full orchestral score is perhaps one of the best means today of evoking the

grandeur and substantial pomp of the Victorian tradition at its height. But besides taking a considerable period of time to perform it takes for granted the presence of skilled musicians in large numbers. Despite the presence of the opera company and the Old Vic orchestra, the amount of preparation involved would have gone beyond the rehearsal allowance. Had Mendelssohn been included at all it would have been in short extracts only.

James Agate's reaction was typical of the more conservative critics. He found the lightness and simplicity of folk music prosaic in comparison to the magniloquence of the classical suite which was 'truly evocative of fairy' (Sunday Times, 15.12.1929). The Daily Mail (Alan Parsons, 10.12.1929) and The Morning Post (10.12.1929) agreed with him. Then again The Era G.W.B., 11.12.1929) and The Manchester Guardian (I.B., 10.12.1929) did not. The Manchester Guardian reviewer argued that Mendelssohn was tainted by sentimentality owing to his association with tradition and that the English atmosphere of a 'moonstruck Warwickshire' was a refreshing innovation. It was left to Ivor Brown to point out that, given the rustic setting and the pervasive spirit of streamlined simplicity, Mendelssohn would have been inappropriate. While he was aware of inadequacies in the Sharp arrangements, wanting something more romantic than 'Hey-jolly-haycock' to enthuse the aristocratic masque of the fairies, he recognized that Mendelssohn, in this context, would have been 'too luscious'.

In the nineteenth century, Oberon was often played by a female soprano. Augustin Daly's notorious production featured an actress with a battery operated electric light to supply 'an ethereal glow (Daly's Theatre, 1895) and she sang 'I know a bank where the wild thyme grows' (II.1.48). Against this background the vitality and kingliness of Gielgud's Oberon stood out. Time and Tide ('Mrs Dangle', 20.12.1929) referred to his regality and The Times

(10.12.1929) called him 'a monarch and a poet'. His handsome masculinity was acknowledged by E. A. Baughan (Daily News, 10.12.1929). Oberon is not a large part and therefore does not tax the actor's physical resources to any great extent: nevertheless, it contains many sensuous and delicate arias in Shakespeare's early lyric manner that call for a fine delivery and striking presence. Reviewers' observations indicate that Gielgud's vocal skill was developing rapidly and that he was responding to the technical challenge. The judgement of The Evening News (10.12.1929) was that his talent conferred distinction upon him:

John Gielgud's Oberon was by far the best thing of the evening. He was the one actor who spoke his lines as if he knew he was speaking glorious verse.

Alan Parsons mentioned his 'appreciation and faultless delivery of the verse' which compared favourably with Titania's lovely, but not always savoured, speeches such as 'Be kind and courteous with this gentleman' (III.1.150) (Daily Mail, 10.12.1929). James Agate singled out Oberon's lines to Puck anticipating the daybreak to exemplify the actor's exquisite diction, likening them to that of the sonnets (Sunday Times, 15.12.1929).

But we are spirits of another sort:
I with the Morning's love have oft made sport,
And, like a forester, the groves may tread,
Even till the eastern gate, all fiery red,
Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams (III.2.388)

Gielgud spoke this passage as if he realised its affinity with the image from Sonnet 33 of the sun,

Kissing with golden face the meadows green
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy (3)

The other quality that he possessed was what The Morning Post, (S.R.L. 10.12.1929) described as 'hearty good humour'. It is possible to play Oberon so that he takes a dim view of Puck's meddling and remains aloof from the fooling that goes on around him. Gielgud chose an opposite strategy in a production that was marked by the evenness with which humour was distributed. With less eloquence than her fairy husband, Titania still radiated an aura of etherial beauty (James Agate, Sunday Times, 15.12.1929, 'Mrs. Dangle', Time and Tide, 20.12.1929).

Comedy was also instanced in the interpretation of the lovers. If it is the treatment of the supernatural inhabitants that signposts a director's conceptual approach to the play at large, then it is often the presentation of Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius and their ornate conceits that sets the tone. What sort of balance will be struck between realism and literary convention in the way they are treated? Consciousness of the difficulties of their scenes together was shown by The Daily Mail (Alan Parsons, 10.12.1929) and The Times (10.12.1929). (Alan Parsons, thought that the high-speed methods of the director relieved their customary tedium.) In this case, burlesque too seems to have been employed though it is difficult to ascertain how much. The Morning Post (S.R.L., 10.12.1929) said that the love scenes were played with 'vigor and lighthearted speed' - the pace possibly giving edge to the comic nuances. Martita Hunt, who played Helena, 'patronized the part in a sophisticated fashion'. Her speaking was meticulous and the attentive ear of The Times (10.12.1929) critic detected only one small fault when she spoke 'To bai+ me with this false derision' (III.2.197) as a line of nine syllables.

Amongst the mechanicals, Quince proved to be a special favourite. Brember Wills played him as a frail, fussy, excitable character. Bottom may have been too conscientious a comedian. A number of reviewers felt that the joke was spoiled because Gyles Isham was too aware of his own

humour (E.A.Baughan, Daily News, 10.12.1929) (James Agate, Sunday Times, 15.12.1929). Both The Daily Telegraph (W.A.Darlington, 10.12.1929), and The Morning Post (S.R.L., 10.12.1929) suggest that in donning the ass's head, a complete mask that fitted over the wearer's head and shoulders, his shortcomings became evident. Snout and Snug acted as foils to each other, the former being enthusiastic while the latter was sullen and sulky. Philostrate was burlesqued and turned into 'an amusing Malvolio-in-the-making' (Ivor Brown, Observer, 15.12.1929). The play's popularity was demonstrated at the box office where, along with Shaw's Androcles and the Lion, it rivalled Hamlet as the most successful revival of the first season. It was a Christmas production.

The new year began with Julius Caesar which was given in its entirety except for the repetition of the news of Portia's death in the quarrel scene. A clue to Gielgud's reading of Antony is afforded by Harcourt Williams's remark that the restored passages were, amongst other things, intended to give a fuller picture of the man. Antony's character 'as a politician as well as a soldier' was to be revealed and this would discover 'the clay feet of the pretty juvenile idol to which we had grown accustomed' (Four Years At The Old Vic, p.57). It was not Gielgud's reputation as a romantic actor then that Harcourt Williams was going to trade upon in casting him as Antony. The part was rather to be developed in a different direction that would take the actor beyond his habitual roles. The restoration of such scenes as the proscription episode (IV.1), a theatrical rarity at the time, would fill in the demagoguery and the cold and ruthless streak that co-exist alongside Antony's hero worship and his ardent feelings.

These ambiguities are climactically focussed in the funeral oration over Caesar's body where he is shown unscrupulously manipulating the crowd

and at the same time giving vent to his passionate indignation. Gielgud apparently underscored the cunning of the rabble rouser, seeming 'to play upon his hearers as effectively as a musician upon his instrument' (Yorkshire Post, 21.1.1930). If this was so then it was a pity that the revelatory line that forces home his indifference to chaos, 'Now let it work; Mischief, thou art afoot' (III.3.261) was lost in the general cacophony (Stage, 21.1.1930). The crowd was extremely volatile throughout, sharing with Antony the quality of being 'splendidly unstable' (R.S.P., Daily Herald, 21.1.1930). What they lacked in numbers they made up for in noise, turning Antony's opening words to a genuine plea for audience as he shouted to be heard above their din (Star, 21.1.1930) - not that this was appreciated by everybody. The Evening News (21.1.1930) objected that the production was acted in the spirit of an end of term play with excess noise and unruly behaviour. Harcourt Williams put his mob in the orchestra pit and had a platform and steps built out over the footlights from which the orations could be delivered. This was to place the pulpit unusually low, almost at stage level but, since the crowd was even lower, the effect of the difference in height between the elevated speaker and his auditors was preserved. The lighting was subdued, the principal focus being upon the face of Antony picked out by a spotlight. His body and the upper halves of the crowd members were reduced to silhouettes which effectively disguised the inexperience and small numbers of the student extras as it increased the sense of chaos and confusion. The students, swelled by certain members of the company not needed on the stage at that time, were instructed to rock their heads and gesticulate wildly. At the crucial moment when Antony, having delivered the final stroke of reading the will, said 'Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?' (III.3.253) they all boiled up onto the stage and over-ran the platform. The Stage (23.1.1930) cited this incident as a vivid theatrical coup whose triumph the director shared with his leading actor:

His own production work deserves special note, for, by making use of a sort of apron stage and steps leading up and down from the orchestra, he was able to present the Roman populace ... as swarming up on to the stage by way of some stone slabs in the centre, near to which Caesar's body was placed, after the close of Antony's oration, delivered with considerable eloquence and subtle cogency by Mr. John Gielgud, not standing up aloof on a rostrum as Tree was wont to do.

The Yorkshire Post (21.1.1930) supplies further detail of the snake-like movements of the players when it described the funeral oration being 'declaimed to a mob swaying upwards from the orchestra pit - a mob in darkness with restless heads and tossing arms silhouetted against a stage in half light'. W.A. Darlington thought that the device would have been still more effective with more room (Daily Telegraph, 21.1.1930).

Although Julius Caesar contains some telling, quiet, domestic episodes, it is predominantly rhetorical and public in tone. The tragedy is indeed concerned with the failure of personal feeling to find adequate expression in public action. Thus it was the declamatory power and ringing eloquence of Gielgud's voice rather than its sensitive, mellifluous strain that was in evidence in his playing of Antony. The Daily News (21.1.1930) called him 'splendidly resonant' and 'vibrant' adding, even so, that subtlety was not disregarded. To The Era, (22.1.1930) he had 'dignity in speech and movement' and special acknowledgement was paid to the avoidance of theatrical effects that did not arise organically out of the lines themselves. The 'admirable force and point' that The Yorkshire Post (21.1.1930) said he had came from his fine speaking underlined by striking poses. The physical sensuality and athleticism of an Antony who 'revels long o' nights' and is a runner in the Lupercal festival was not greatly emphasized.

If the use of a full text had lent depth and complexity to Antony then it may have had a broader influence as well. The Star's (21.1.1930) comments,

suggesting perhaps some suspicions about the complete integrity of the interpretation of Antony, go on to mention a larger singularity:

How much of his drawing of Mark Antony was Mr. Gielgud's reading of the Bard and how much the producer's is, of course, a company secret, but it was truly an excellent and altogether natural performance from the first line of the speech, hurriedly spoken to quell a tumult - a welcome change from the usual 'stock' staging... {There was an} unusual atmosphere created by the company's intent to show not so much a play as psychological drawing of characters.

The point is echoed in The Times (21.1.1930) where the play was said to be taken 'chiefly as a study in individual psychology'.

Some of the ambiguity that surrounded Brember Wills's Caesar is captured in the conflicting accounts from different spectators. The Daily Herald (21.1.1930) said that he was 'simply one long, noble pose'. Elsewhere he was called a tired, old man (Star, 23.1.1930), nervous and unstable (Daily News, 21.1.1930). He seems to have retained his dignity which was enhanced by an impressive aspect and utterance (Stage, 23.1.1930). Adèle Dixon's Calphurnia lost all dignity when she pleaded with him not to go to the Capitol. She 'wheedled her husband like a school-girl' (W.A.Darlington, Daily Telegraph, 21.1.1930). And, in this respect, she threw Martita Hunt's Roman nobility and pride as Portia into relief. Donald Wolfitt played Cassius with great fervour and energy (Yorkshire Post, 21.1.1930). The Star (21.1.1930), however, intimated that some of the ambivalence present in Antony was missing from this fierce and passionate rendering. Did Wolfitt neglect the scheming intellectual in his enthusiasm for the impetuous, jealous man? Brutus was to have been played by Gyles Isham, but, at the last moment, he developed a throat infection and Harcourt Williams was forced to step in and take his place. He made a

'sensitive, ruminating', Brutus who was a foil to a Cassius quivering with 'nerve ridden jealous fury', although with insufficient rehearsal time he failed to satisfy himself or the reviewers.⁵

With the next production - As You Like It - there were some signs of a relapse back into the over-fast, careless speaking that had marred the opening of the season. At least, complaints of gabbling and prosaic naturalism begin to appear again in reviews.

The play got off to a bad start with the actors', including Gielgud's Orlando, making the dialogue sound stilted and artificial. They seemed over-serious in their manner and they failed to capture the correct lightness of tone (Queen, 19.2.1930) (Morning Post, 11.12.1930). Oliver and Charles may have been especially to blame for this (The Times, 11.2.1930). Harcourt Williams's triangular scene, with some small rostrums and several tree trunks in front of a pastoral landscape, fared better, creating a mood of outdoor freshness. So did Martita Hunt's Rosalind. When she made her entrance, momentum started to build up and the requisite gaiety was eventually achieved. Without a good Rosalind, of course, this play must fail. Martita Hunt, though she wins praise from various quarters, did not entirely meet the requirements of the part. The Morning Post (11.12.1930) admitted that she was beautifully spoken but tempered this praise by saying that 'there is an edge in her manner more suitable to other parts'. The Daily News (11.2.1950) felt that Rosalind was not the ideal character for the actress, but went on to compliment her on her 'archness and vivacity' which contributed 'liveliness and charm'. Of all the reviews, The Times was hardest on her though still mixing praise with blame.

Rosalind in Miss Hunt's able and impetuous hands became a modern young woman who knew she had only one line in ten that would 'get across' to an audience attuned to the idea of speed, and to that one line she

made a positively inaudible haste. She failed to bring out the quieter dignified qualities of Rosalind but was better with exhibiting her courage and wit.

If this criticism harkens back to the earlier ones of Romeo and Juliet and The Merchant of Venice, then its reference to 'an audience attuned to the idea of speed' suggests a growing acceptance of the new methods of delivery.

The fact was highlighted by the recruitment of Balliol Holloway to play Jaques instead of Gyles Isham, who was still indisposed. Coming from outside the company, Holloway was not familiar with the vocal style Harcourt Williams had been gradually cultivating and his technique clashed with that of the other actors. While his characterization was reasonably well defined, his general style of playing seemed ponderous and mannered. He appears to have invested this professional cynic with scholarly dignity and made him prone to sudden outbreaks of stinging invective; the seven ages of man speech had a dispassionate, 'well judged emphasis' (Stage, 12.2.1930).

Jaques's style did not fit the manner of the company. He plays with slow deliberation, aiming at points - a sort of hush precedes his more important moments ... He therefore seemed out of place. (Everyman, 20.2.1930)

Thus the advent of a guest actor once more raised the question of the correct pace of delivery of Shakespearean verse, only this time certain reviewers were beginning to see the disadvantages of the old method in relation to the new.

In the role of Orlando, Gielgud was inevitably overshadowed by his more loquacious mistress and Holloway's Jaques. This is the way it should be, for Orlando must subordinate himself to Rosalind's initiative once they

are in the Forest of Arden. The important thing with the fantastic wooing in disguise is to capture the right tone of playfulness without sacrificing the underlying seriousness of the emotion which can be so effective when it suddenly breaks through.

Rosalind. and this way will I take upon me to wash your
liver as clean as a sound sheep's heart, that
there shall be not one spot of love in't.

Orlando. I would not be cured, youth. (III.2.385)

According to The Stage (12.2.1930), Gielgud and Martita Hunt together realised this.

The love scenes were given the appropriate air of make-believe shading off into romance by Rosalind and Orlando.

When it came to the wrestling match with Charles, Gielgud managed to retain the illusion of Orlando's masculine dignity and resourcefulness despite the farcical way in which this episode was treated (Queen, 19.2.1930). A collection of wide comments of appraisal from various reviews, such as 'fervently powerful' (Evening News, 11.2.1930), 'handsome and manly' (Daily News, 11.2.1930), 'manly and attractive' (Queen, 19.2.1930), 'contributed largely to the success of the evening' (The Times, 11.2.1930), create an impression of overall capability while doing little to establish any detail. The Era (12.2.1930) and The Observer (H.H., 16.2.1930) disagreed over the seriousness of the portrayal, The Observer's judgement of 'somewhat over-serious' being contradicted by The Era's assertion that 'even in the most love sick moments he was never unduly solemn'.

Other notable performances were those of Audrey, William and the versatile Donald Wolfit's Touchstone. Monopolizing the repartee in their brief scene together, Wolfit did not prevent the rustic William from

raising laughter with his huge, idiot's grin (Daily News, 11.2.1930). In a grotesque make-up with an upturned nose, Margaret Webster, as Audrey, won the ambiguous praise of The Queen (19.2.1930) for illustrating 'exactly our ideal of a "foul slut" '. The Old Vic representation tried to make acceptable what the eighteenth century would have called the 'play's improbabilities' in the casual and inconsequential handling of the plot. It was 'gay and irresponsible if uneven in quality' (Era, 12.2.1930).

Macbeth (March, 1930) constituted a return to tragic seriousness after a successful venture into modern drama with Bernard Shaw's Androcles and the Lion, one of the controversial changes that Harcourt Williams introduced into the company's repertoire. A reproduction of Owen Paul Smyth's bleak set design shows a large pillar to the left with a staircase circling round out of sight, behind it. Further back there is an arched platformed inset with a smaller flight of steps to the left on the platform (Four Years At The Old Vic, p.64). From here Macbeth and Banquo peered down upon the weird sisters, Macbeth was oppressed by the sight of the visionary dagger, and Macduff awoke the castle after his discovery of Duncan's corpse. Important stage properties like the witches' cauldron and the throne in the banquet scene also occupied this space. The curving steps that crept around the pillar were used for the descent from the heath, the steps leading up to Duncan's quarters, the entry to the Macbeths' castle and the battlements. Not visible from the drawing is the orchestra pit into which the drunken porter descended to admit Macduff and Lennox and which allowed entry to the invading British army.

Harcourt Williams explained his arrangement of the text in a programme note :

As an experiment, and on reasonable authority,
 Act 1 Scene 2 is omitted together with the doubtful
 introduction of Hecate. The omission of the 'King's
 Evil' is not so defensible but expedient.

The silence of reviewers on the resulting conflation of the two witch scenes (1.1)(1.3) tacitly condones the experimental cutting. The extravagant language of 1.2. where the bleeding Sergeant appears has been regarded as evidence of its spuriousness ; however, much can be said in favour of retaining it in performance. For one thing, its placing between two scenes with the prescient weird sisters reinforces structurally the impression of the supernatural surrounding human affairs. For another, it characterizes the protagonist as a loyal and brave, if ruthless, warrior. Gielgud would subsequently rely on these passages, uncut, in both his later productions (Tour, 1942, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1952), to prepare for his first entrance, and he sought in his own playing to indicate Macbeth's original moral purity. Contrasting his own interpretation with that of Olivier who, in the Glen Byam Shaw production (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1955), successfully presented an antithetical reading, Gielgud told an interviewer that he considered Macbeth to be 'a fairly good man in the opening of the play, a man only tempted from nobility later by his wife and by the witches and by growing ambition to murder Duncan and become King' (Roy Newquist, Showcase, p.145). There is no evidence that his conception was any different in 1930, but the removal of the first introductory references to Macbeth's valour could not have helped him to create the idea of a noble warrior. This was nevertheless the impression that he wished to give, building up his naturally, willowy stature with thick materials and armour.

He swathed himself in a heavy cloak of embroidered design which he wore over a studded cuirass and a shaggy, animal's pelt jerkin. His legs

were cross-gartered. There was a horned viking helmet on his head that fitted over a loose balaclava of mail links. A long, drooping moustache and heavy, angular brows with darkly lined eyes completed his physical evocation. Over his shoulder he carried a sheathed broad sword and on the third 'All hail' of the sisters he allowed it to drop ringingly to the floor to mark his discomposure. The business was his own, but his appearance owed much to Irving's and the picture of him as Macbeth by Bernard J. Partridge.⁶ As the play developed, Macbeth became progressively more haggard, his face becoming lined and his hair grey so that a corresponding physical deterioration underlined his mental disintegration. The same theme was used in his make-up in 1942 where he played the role for the last time and the practice was handed on to Ralph Richardson's ill-fated portrayal ten years later where Gielgud directed only. Ivor Brown referred to this make-up as 'a fine kaleidoscope of ruin' (Observer, 23.3.1930).

With Romeo, Antonio, Richard II, Oberon, Antony, and Orlando behind him, Gielgud seems to have approached his first great tragic role in a different spirit. It was not only that the stature of the protagonist far surpassed these others in scope and range and that the compression of the language demanded a greater intensity of feeling. In an interview given just prior to his first Lear he illustrated the dictum that this shortest of tragedies is one of the most imaginatively unrelenting in observing to a reporter that it taxed his vocal powers more than did Lear (G.W.B., Observer, 12.4.1931). Macbeth is also, for an actor of his physical and mental disposition, a more distant and independent study. His early roles to some extent can all be said to be 'straight' parts that drew upon his natural endowments as a romantic, juvenile performer. Gielgud's own manner of approaching the parts may not always have coincided with a personal exhibitionist tendency, but there was an implied background of shared traits that underwrote the process of identification, a continuity of outline that bridged the

gulf between reality and illusion. Macbeth did not have this continuity of outline and, in this sense, it was a significant step forward into a form of character acting that anticipated the interpretations of Lear and the elder Antony that were to follow. The character parts of Trofimov and Konstantin that he had played in the not widely-publicised productions of The Cherry Orchard (Lyric, 1925) and The Seagull (Little, 1926) had already given him some unusual experience in the immersion of self in a separate persona, as Gielgud recalled much later to Roy Newquist (Showcase, p.114). Chekhov's tightly-constructed, integrated ensemble works were then only just starting to appear on the stage in this country.

Most of the reviewers were therefore surprised by the degree to which the actor transformed himself. The Daily Herald (M.E., 20.3.1930) reported that he had revealed 'unexpected depth and virility' and Ivor Brown wrote 'Mr. Gielgud's acting has "filled out" as they say of growing boys. It has ripened into a rich masculinity' (Observer, 23.3.1930). He went on to allude to Gielgud's 'clear strong and various delivery' and perhaps most important, to the clear delineation of the successive phases of Macbeth's degeneration. Here was 'no subtle neurotic, but a soldier turned criminal'. It was the accuracy with which the ice-run course of the principal figure was mapped, together with the technical placing and husbanding of resources, that surprised James Agate as well - particularly as he was prepared for the performance's failure beforehand. Agate noted the problem of relating the Macbeth who is an instigator of action up until the banquet scene to the spiritually spent tyrant of the final scenes. His absence from the stage after IV.I caused most actors to begin all over again when it was time for them to come back on. Gielgud's Macbeth was different in that he seemed to have lived through the interval. He allegedly carried the audience away and founded a precedent for this reviewer who,

for the first time in his experience, saw a Macbeth that 'retained his hold upon this play till the end'. It may be helpful here to point out that Gielgud's pacing of the role depended on two strategically placed intervals which must have provided useful breathing spaces. In his own productions he experimented slightly with their positioning, but never erred from the practical conviction that the play should be divided into three movements. It is tempting to read back into the Old Vic presentation the placement of the intervals in 1942, the second part opening with Macbeth instated as a king in his palace at Forres and the third part opening with the banquet and the appearance of Banquo's ghost. In 1952 the pattern was varied with the first twelve minute interval occurring in the same place and the second coming later, after the banquet scene. The play still only lasted two hours forty-nine minutes and twenty-one seconds (Macbeth, prompt-book).

In a return to the practice of the eighteenth century, two of the weird sisters were played by men. The third, Adèle Dixon, was effectively differentiated from the other two - like the third witch in Roman Polanski's film (1971) and in the stage production of Trevor Nunn (Other Place, 1976). If the masks that they wore and the great black shadows that they cast when they stopped Macbeth's way on the heath tended to disguise their physical differences, then their voices ensured a distinction. Adèle Dixon spoke in a 'beautiful, pliable voice' that stood out against 'the horrid choked utterance' of Brember Wills and the 'minor screech of Powell Lloyd' (Era, 19.3.1930). They looked up at Macbeth, on the inset platform, to hail him with their prophetic greeting. In spite of his martial exterior, Gielgud generated refinement and deceptive gentleness at the outset (Jean Sterling Mackinlay, Stage, 20.3.1930). His brooding reflectiveness distanced the ruggedness of the warrior. The Times (18.3.1930), possibly with a glance at his viking costume, found him

less of the fighting Scotsman than the Dane ... all through the play Mr. Gielgud is busy establishing a close relationship with Hamlet ... Macbeth seems to lack resolution to commit murder at the beginning and to control so turbulent a country as Scotland.

Then Lady Macbeth entered and spoke,

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promis'd (1.5.12)

in such a way that this critic was convinced that she and her husband had talked over their murder plan for years.

In her general conception of the part Martita Hunt seems to have owed more to Ellen Terry than Sarah Siddons. (She had the same auburn hair.) Far from browbeating her husband into committing murder she charmed him with her feminine wiles. This won her the disapproval of some reviewers who were only willing to consider interpretations in the Siddons tradition. The Daily Telegraph (19.3.1930) objected that 'she did not conspire in producing the illusion of ruthless power egging on a weak man' and George Warrington, stating that the part of Macbeth's wife had not been satisfactorily played since the death of that great actress, declared that Martita Hunt gave 'a respectable performance' which was lacking in the necessary fiendishness and brutality (Country Life, 29.3.1930). Whether one agrees with this or not, it is reassuring to hear Ivor Brown redressing the balance. She apparently aged prematurely in the same way as Macbeth did and closely related her degeneration to his, discovering a similar coherence of development. Brown wrote :

The thing is complete from vigorous, aspiring womanhood to the pale corruption of a poisoned mind within a failing, fainting frame. (Observer, 23.3.1930).

Her gestures were particularly striking, if slightly larger than life. Reynolds News (23.3.1930) thought them exaggerated. In her scenes with Macbeth before the murder, red filters drew attention to the hands of the accomplices. The Era (19.3.1930) noticed how 'aided by subtle lighting' the hands of Lady Macbeth seemed to 'glow in the palms with red light as though the shadow of blood was already on them'.

Anxious to fill out his part orally as well as physically, Gielgud may have overemphasised some of his effects. It was suggested by The Times (18.3.1930) that the speech in which Macbeth sees the air-drawn dagger was spoken 'too much in the platform manner to convey the full sense of the bloody business'. Another reviewer gave the actor credit for his general good speaking but picked out the line 'Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse' (III.2.53) to indicate a lapse. Evidently Gielgud broke the mood by turning the last five words into 'an onomatopoeic representation of a tiger preparing to devour a kid' (George Warrington, Country Life, 29.3.1930). However, these comments are to be weighed against the shock that Agate says he felt when Macbeth came from the murder clutching the daggers. 'To experience this shock is to believe in the murder, and this again is to believe in the actor' (Sunday Times, 23.3.1930). How the startling impact of this moment was achieved is difficult to say except that it involved the awkwardness with which the weapons were carried. Garrick had allowed the two daggers to knock together in his trembling fists. Macbeth's entrance from Duncan's chamber behind the pillar would have been delayed by his having to descend the high winding staircase to get to floor level.

For the banquet scene Lady Macbeth sat aloft in a centrally placed throne on the raised platform. The banquet table was arranged longways

below and parallel with the proscenium. The guests sat on stools and Macbeth's place had a hidden light that shone eerily upwards on the ghost of Banquo, distinguished when living for his 'quiet reserve' (Morning Post, 18.3.1930). Gielgud broke with tradition in his second staging of this scene (1952) by setting the table to the left of the stage, at a slant, the end nearest to the audience furthest inward. Lady Macbeth's throne on a small dais, was set to the right and angled slightly towards the table. The twice-repeated visitation of the murdered Banquo marked an important turning point in Gielgud's characterization as it demonstrates Macbeth's relinquishing of an outward veneer of social form and an active solicitation of evil. His next action is to seek out the weird sisters and command their aid. The conveyance of this feeling in performance was affirmed by The Times (18.3.1930) reviewer whose drawing of a rather odd comparison perhaps hints at the unusualness of its management. The appearance of Banquo's ghost reputedly broke the last links of decency and sensibility 'which can be so easily read into Macbeth's character'. The writer compared this to Hamlet's moment of abandonment when he throws himself into Ophelia's grave. 'So does Mr. Gielgud's Macbeth accept, with a sudden rush of manhood, all the implications of his crime.' The interpretation of Macbeth's development as a maturation process and the Hamlet analogy add to the provocative, youthful ambiance that seems to have surrounded Gielgud's performance.

In the last scenes Agate said Gielgud's behaviour was fittingly loud and boisterous with a drop into a lull for the Tomorrow soliloquy. His skilfull conservation of energy was implicit in a final vocal delivery that, if it was not subtle, letting 'the fine shades go and the sound have it', was still justifiable. 'Vocally superb' was Agate's verdict. (Sunday Times, 23.3.1930).

Agate's review, which is inclined to play up the degree of Gielgud's immersion within the role, needs to be read alongside the cooler appraisal of The Queen's (25.3.1930) reviewer who acknowledged the aptitude for impersonation that had been shown. Gielgud was 'a younger Macbeth than we are used to' albeit in agreement with Shakespeare's lines. The Morning Post (18.3.1930) probably provides the most representative summary when, after admitting the needlessness of his doubts in advance that this young performer could command sufficient robustness, the writer went on to define the achievement as one of technique and intellect.

This fine and intelligent actor kept alert throughout to the complexities in what appears a simple nature, and the delivery of his lines was excellent, clear and dignified to the end.

The production of Hamlet (April, 1930) (discussed below pp.141-154 afterwards transferred to the West End (June, 1930, Queen's), brought the close of the first season to a suitable climax. The second season began with part one of Henry IV (September, 1930). On the first night not even standing room was available and the atmosphere was so close that by the end of the evening two women had fainted. The curtain opened on what The Times (15.9.1930) considered to be a beautiful tableau comprising the King and his lords. This changed to the tavern, where the new member of the company, Ralph Richardson as Prince Hal, was discovered in bed. The performance of the business of serving him breakfast was commended by The Manchester Guardian (19.9.1930) and judged permissible by The Church Times (26.9.1930) because 'it did not obscure the essential unfolding of character'. Neither did it impede the transitions from scene to scene, Harcourt Williams directing his actors to come out and deliver their speeches to the audience as the curtain fell silently behind them (Morning Post, 15.9.1930). The second scene change returned the audience to the King's palace. A council table had been set

on the stage and next to it stood Worcester and Northumberland listening to the rebukes of their sovereign. A little way off from the main group where attention was focussed, with his back to the table, stood Gielgud's Hotspur. When Worcester had been peremptorily dismissed and Northumberland was offering placatory excuses, Hotspur spun round and launched into a vehement protestation. His manner was openly aggressive. The Times (15.9.1930) referred to him as rounding 'like a tiger' in his defence.

The Linguaphone Shakespeare Series recital (1930), containing Hotspur's account of the events that took place after the battle of Holmedon, points to the kind of delivery that may have been given from the stage. Comedy is brought to the fore as the actor's voice colours the encounter between the soldier and the effeminate lord whose idiom he imitates.

He call'd them untaught knaves, unmannerly,
To bring a slovenly unhandsome corse
Betwixt the wind and his nobility (1.3.43)

is delivered entirely in the pompous, affected tones of the lord while

I know not what -
He should, or he should not - for he made me mad
To see him shine so brisk, and smell so sweet, (1.3.52)

is in the frenetic staccato of the infuriated Hotspur. There is thus a strong feeling of mimic dialogue within the monologue frame that approximates to the to and fro rhythm of the conversation within the original encounter. The two voices are brought dissonantly together in a line like 'Of guns, and drums, and wounds - God save the mark! -' (1.3.56) where the speaker's impatience bursts forth in the oath ousting the inflated diction of the lord. 'Parmacetti' is pronounced mincingly with a significant broadening of the 'r' sound. 'Gielgud rolls his 'r's' and his eyes in an embarrassing Surrey

side manner' panned The Yorkshire Post (15.9.1930). It was a technique that drew laughter upon Hotspur as well as upon the satirised courtier and it was disapproved of by those reviewers who looked upon Hotspur and not Hal as the hero of the play.⁷ In the opinion of The Morning Post (15.9.1930) the sheer boisterousness of the characterization was overdone' - an audience should laugh with Hotspur but never at him - 'The Manchester Guardian (19.9.1930) expressed similar sentiments whilst the writer began by precluding his criticism with a brief prospectus of Gielgud's general qualifications that, with the recent success of his Hamlet, were fresh in the mind. The actor displayed distinction, ability and an intellectual appreciation of his parts. His Hotspur was fiery, vital and possessed faultless diction but 'his fury was perhaps a trifle overdone. The result was some of the audience saw humour where none was intended'. Yet does Hotspur escape from Shakespeare's satire? Lear's intention to divide his kingdom is looked upon as a grotesque aberration, but at least he remembers to bring the map with him - something which Hotspur forgets to do in the scene in Wales. Then there is Worcester's appraisal, spoken candidly to Vernon, of 'A hare-brain'd Hotspur govern'd by spleen', (II.2.16). Gielgud's interpretation promoted a more detached view of Harry Percy that encountered some resistance analogous, perhaps, to the rendering of the younger Mark Antony. Other reviewers appreciated the mock heroic vein he had introduced. E.A. Baughan decided that Gielgud was right in giving 'comic exaggeration to the impetuosity of Hotspur' (Daily News and Chronicle, 15.9.1930) whereas The Christian Science Monitor (P.A., 11.10.1930) made this assertion:

His performance of the tempestuous part, Hotspur, was full of force and fire from its opening lines; and its bombast was so cleverly and naturally relieved with humour by the use of significant emphasis and meaningful gesture, that the dialogue was punctuated throughout with quite legitimate chuckles.

The emphasis on the rant in Hotspur's speech may have occasioned some monotony. A.E. Wilson appreciated the dynamism and the gusto of the resounding rhetoric (Star, 15.9.1930). The Times (15.9.1930), on the other hand, saw the dangers of a role that could easily seem to 'dwell too long and too loudly on one note to be a musician's piece'. The reviewer in The Jewish Chronicle (19.9.1930) mentioned that there was a little too much insistence on metre at times and some overstressing of consonants - a view supported by the recorded recital. The necessity for periods of comparative repose was all the more pressing when the speaking of the role was underlined by a restless stance, abrupt, angular gestures and eyes that were forever darting from one object to another (Era, 17.9.1930).

The two scenes with Lady Percy, played by the new leading lady of the company, Dorothy Green, after the departure of Martita Hunt, should have provided just this relief. In their short colloquy together in England, she appeared not to have been crushed by her husband's refusal to take her into his confidence and, instead, cultivated an air of 'humorous appreciation' for his follies. E. A. Baughan thought that this was 'finely suggested' (Daily News and Chronicle, 15.9.1930). In the scene in Wales she and Hotspur had to share the centre of attention with a long Celtic, whiskered Glendower who was burlesqued rather partisanly (Evening Standard 15.9.1930) and a bespectacled and foolishly uxorious Mortimer. Harcourt Williams was evidently trying to explain Mortimer's inactivity, but this is to blur the opposition of the one pair of romantic lovers to the brusque camaraderie of the other pair. The decision to turn the legitimate heir of the English throne into a 'ninny' was questioned (Morning Post, 15.9.1930) (Jewish Chronicle, 19.9.1930). In any case this did not seem to have distracted unduly from the relationship that Gielgud and Dorothy Green created. Their

wrangling was lighthearted and it served to humanize and restore the balance that Gielgud's satire had tilted. Lady Percy's affection for her husband, which prompted The Times (19.9.1930) to call her 'a little gem of smiling tender comedy, an aspect of woman in every facet of it', could have lacked some definition, showing that Dorothy Green had not yet fully settled into the company, as The South London Press (16.9.1930) was to suggest. Still it was a decisive factor in regulating sympathy for Gielgud's Hotspur who remained largely on good terms with the audience.

Henry Wolston's Falstaff was an exception to the prevailing atmosphere of comedy that the production set out to reinforce. His was a rather muted performance, stronger in soliloquy than in the exchanges of repartee (Observer, 14.9.1930; P.A., Christian Science Monitor, 11.10.1930). The catechism on honour was, by all accounts, one of his best moments (Morning Post, 15.9.1930). Ralph Richardson brought humour and poignancy to his playing of the Prince, but did better in the early scenes of low life humour in the tavern than in the later ones of martial chivalry. The 'puckish' drollery and 'quaint pathos' that The Daily News and Chronicle (E. A. Baughan, 15.9.1930) noticed delineate a recognizable persona though the reviewer ends his description with the stricture that the actor should learn to acquire a soldierly carriage.

The next two productions were of late plays that both made use of unusual décor. The Tempest began in October and was set on a fabulous, levantine island. Gielgud's Prospero wore a turban and was clean shaven. Then there was Antony and Cleopatra (November 1930). The choice of this play may have been urged by Edith Evans's donation of the scenic pieces from her failed production of Delilah. These formed the basis of the simple, architectural set with pillars that stood for both Rome and Egypt.

The Daily Telegraph (H.M.W., 25.11.1930) felt that the same set 'for the Egyptian Queen's palace and the deck of Pompey's galley scarcely made for lucidity', but it avoided having to underwrite the rapidly alternating localities of the action with complicated scene changes. A programme note disclosed Harcourt Williams's intentions:

Harley Granville Barker points out that scarcely a line in this play is devoted to verbal scene painting, and advises the producer to discard the forty-two realistic scenes of the editors and rely on Shakespeare's deliberate use of a technique that the freer theatre of his day permitted, resulting in a rapid sequence of dramatic events almost kaleidoscopic in effect. I have also followed Barker's suggestions in the matter of costume, which incidentally sweeps away the sartorial difficulties in the text, and abandoned an 'archaeological accuracy' unknown to Shakespeare for such garments as are to be seen in the pictures of Paul Veronese, which is probably how the author saw his Romans habited.

It was this matter of costuming that aroused the most controversy. Cleopatra in a red wig and a long tudor dress and crown invited comparison with Queen Elizabeth or a Circe from the canvas of Carlo Dolci (R.G.S., Evening Standard, 2.6.1930; H.M.W., Daily Telegraph, 25.11.1930). Antony had a classical helmet, a beard and a half-cuirass worn over the top of voluminous clothes that were full of slashed pleats. The thicker Renaissance clothing helped to increase Gielgud's stature and disguise his age, but even then he was a young, slender-bodied Antony. Everyman (4.12.1930) said that he had beauty if 'his manner was too young. He has not yet quite the weight for the part', whereas James Agate did not mince words on the subject, pronouncing him not bulky enough and too hairy. He diagnosed that Gielgud was hampered by his false beard (Sunday Times, 30.6.1930) and took issue with Harcourt Williams and Granville Barker, whose Preface to the play Williams's production was directly based upon, arguing that Shakespeare's imagination should not be confined to the limits of the Elizabethan platform.

The Era (26.11.1930) took sides with Agate, affirming that to remove Antony and Cleopatra from its historical period was to divest the dramatized cultural conflict of significance. 'To dress the play in a mixture of Elizabethan and other styles robs it of effect since it is in essence a conflict between Roman pride and Eastern magnificence'. Possibly this critic is alluding to a real difficulty he had in distinguishing Romans from Egyptians when they were divorced from their usual sartorial context, yet the members of the different societies could still have been distinguishable without being historically recognizable. Ivor Brown was in the vanguard of those who approved of the director's innovation. He saw clearly that the effect was not simply to transfer the play from one historical period to another but to evoke a broad milieu of association that was felt to be more relevant to the text and its poetic resonances. Essentially the idea was to regain the imaginative freedom that Shakespeare had inherited in an age which saw the lives of other societies and epochs in terms of their own, by transcending specific historical details altogether. Hence the eclectic spirit which drew on a range of items from a wide spectrum of history to produce a fabulous conglomerate. Brown explained that 'the clothes suggest neither a place or period but a mood, the temper is that of Renaissance brilliance with its flash of phrases and passion for masquing' (Observer 30.6.1930). The Manchester Guardian (I.B., 26.11.1930) testified similarly to the felicitous atmosphere that was supplied by a colourful and opulent wardrobe that possessed a 'confused richness of contemporary romantic notions'.

However, the décor also tended to emphasize the fastidiousness and refinement of the performers. This does not seem to have been something that was settled on beforehand and it may have relied partly on arbitrary associations. Renaissance costumes covered more of the actors' bodies than Roman military

tunics and Egyptian girdles and the age of Elizabeth was thought of as a time of elaborate courtesies and formal ceremonies rather than one of sexual licence and spontaneous feeling. When this was combined with certain features of the acting - neither Gielgud nor Dorothy Green were noted for their radiation of forceful, primitive passions or voluptuous sensuality; they identified more easily with refined and cerebral characters - the result was that the range of the roles was narrowed. The artifice, the intellect, and the regality of the two lovers were convincingly encompassed, but the vulgarity, brutishness, and dissolute epicureanism were not. Shakespeare, of course, has packed an uncommonly wide spectrum of feeling into single characters and develops a dynamic tension from contradictory juxtapositions. His Cleopatra is both a great Queen with the goddess-like attributes of Isis and a dark-skinned gypsy. How far the hearsay references of the other characters and the overall epic strain of the language are intended to establish reverberations and how far the actor and the actress are intended to bear out the descriptions with their natural qualities is uncertain. There is an undercurrent of scepticism in the writing that exists in delicate balance with the appeal to belief and a production must be wary of upsetting this with the way its concrete particulars are introduced. When Cleopatra draws an idealized portrait of Antony as a colossus bestriding the world, she continues whimsically 'Think you there was or might be such a man / As this I dreamt of?' (V.2.193). Dolabella's reply is 'Gentle madam, no'.

Still there was an opinion amongst reviewers that Gielgud and Dorothy Green embodied certain facets of the roles much better than they did others. Ivor Brown illustrated this when he observed that the sensuality of the East was left to the poetry working upon the imagination. Cleopatra was a Renaissance beauty who charmed men with her artificial wiles instead of a voluptuous prostitute. She appeared to be covering up her lack of

animalism with too much archness. It was said that this Cleopatra's most successful scene was the comic one of her listening to the messenger dispraising Octavia's beauty which Gielgud supervised because of Harcourt Williams's involvement. This would have given the actress opportunities to be sly and satirically witty (H.M.W., Daily Telegraph, 25.11.1930) (Stage, 27.11.1930). In the same way, Antony was not naturally carnal, being less given up to dotage than the text requires. Only touching the grossness of his part lightly, Gielgud came across as 'the Renaissance adventurer', just as his Cleopatra was 'a Renaissance exquisite' (Observer, 30.6.1930). The Era (26.11.1930) also found Cleopatra remarkable for her thoughtfulness rather than her broad, sweeps of passion. Where languour was wanted she was febrile and where she needed to be a primitive slave of pleasure she was a great lady 'who suggested qualities of brain which Antony's mistress certainly never possessed'. Of Gielgud, the reviewer said that his speaking had meaning and beauty while he did not create the man behind the words. There was too much resolution and self-assurance in his Antony for the inner knowledge of failure and his loss of grandeur to become tragically explicit.

This is not to imply that Gielgud ignored that side of the character which his physique and temperament made him less equipped to deal with. The account of him in The Star (W.M., 25.6.1930) producing rare vigour and bombast, drinking like a trooper and making love like a hussar suggests a conscientious attempt to compensate for physical deficiencies with energetic, extraverted playing and large actions. But there were signs that the strain of playing leading parts in a Shakespearean repertory company for two seasons was beginning to tell. His voice especially showed indications of strain. The Daily Telegraph (25.11.1930) critic detected some tiredness and the comments of The Times (25.11.1930) demonstrate that this became more noticeable

as the performance wore on. The presentation moved with rare swiftness and fire, though Gielgud 'used too soon and too often the utmost range of his voice', Antony is a very long and strenuous part, even with two intervals of ten and fifteen minutes, and Harcourt Williams's preference for almost full texts did not make it any easier. The production included the scene with Ventidius in Parthia if it did not contain Cleopatra's ,

Nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy; yet t' imagine
An Antony were nature's part 'gainst fancy
condemning shadows quite. (V.2.97).

(Ivor Brown, 29.11.1930, Birmingham Reference Library). Moreover Antony and Cleopatra was not such a very well-known play in the theatre as the other plays Gielgud had been featured in at the Old Vic. Subsequently, he recalled the difficulties in learning involved and highly compressed speeches whose meaning was unclear to him. The solution with an opaque passage like,

Of late, when I cried 'HO!'
Like boys unto a muss, kings would start forth
And cry 'Your will?' Have you no ears? I am
Antony yet. (III.13.90).

was to keep closely to the punctuation and rely on the rhythm to approach the meaning.

I even played Antony in Antony and Cleopatra for which I was utterly unsuited, but I padded my doublet and wore a false beard and shouted and boomed, and achieved some sort of result. I remember thinking that I could not learn the words because there were whole speeches I did not understand and there was no time to discuss or analyze them. So I tried a different approach, looking carefully at the punctuation and hoping that the sense would in some way emerge. And I found that it seemed to help. (An Actor and His Time, p.94)

Some critics were prepared to accept a civilized Antony whose lust was less in evidence than his chivalry. The Manchester Guardian (26.11.1930) was content with an actor who 'fully discovers just that subtle, sensual quality, that Renaissance refinement on barbarism which makes Antony the most exciting of all Shakespeare's Romans'. For The Stage (27.11.1940), an imposing figure, a dignified mien and a sonorous utterance was enough. Yet Agate was not prepared to countenance such a modification of the general conception of Antony or Cleopatra and wrote scathingly on the miscasting of both players :

Miss Dorothy Green, looking like one of the lovelier Lelys, gave a straight-laced and highly refrigerative performance of the arch-hussy, holding her, as it were, at arm's length ... Pure intellect was used to present pure love. The sensuality was missing and the vulgarities.

Towards the end of this review he did qualify this harsh judgement somewhat by concurring with Ivor Brown that the last scenes of the tragedy where worldly failure and the double suicides of the pair purge their love of its temporal grossness, were acted superbly in spite of tiredness (Sunday Times, 30.6.1930).

Strongest of the supporting roles was Ralph Richardson's Enobarbus. Richardson's talent for discovering poetry and pathos in bluff, down-to-earth characters, which sets off Gielgud's air of romantic elevation and has therefore led to their frequent pairing together, found a perfect vehicle in this cynical, candid soldier who finds his heart at odds with his common-sense. To the Cydnus speech he imparted a quality of wonder (Era, 26.11.1930). Later, in the brief soliloquy that ends Act Three when Enobarbus finally decides to leave his master, his rueful reluctance was particularly well done (Stage, 27.11.1930) (H.M.W., Daily Telegraph, 25.11.1930).

Twelfth Night was the presentation that opened the rebuilt theatre at Sadler's Wells. The run started, appropriately enough, on January 6th 1931, with speeches and telegrams being read out before the start of the performance. Many celebrities were present, among them Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson and Dame Madge Kendal who afterwards joined Lilian Bayliss and the other special guests upon the stage at the end of the evening to conclude the opening ceremonies. It was a protracted and auspicious occasion and no doubt this peculiar atmosphere coloured the evening's main entertainment.

Earlier on, in the previous year, The Old Vic Magazine (2.11.1930) had told its readers that Joan Cross and Summer Austin had sung in the incompleted building to test the acoustics, which emerged triumphant. But in the event this forecast proved somewhat over-optimistic. Whilst Sadler's Wells may have been all right for singing, the physical structure of the theatre was not suited to communicating the nuances of Shakespearean verse. Its salient features were the large area of blank wall around the proscenium which separated the stage from the balcony circle, the size and depth of the orchestra pit that had steps leading from each side of the platform down into it, and the greater width of the stalls in relation to the proscenium front so that spectators on either end had to view the action of a play obliquely, looking past the wall that confronted them. It was a larger theatre altogether than the Old Vic, with modern conveniences such as a ventilation system in the roof whose low and steady hum set up a competitive noise. A problem of equal proportions that was to emerge later on was one of the transfer of plays between the two theatres. This entailed difficulties for the public in booking and difficulties for the technical staff in the transportation of properties and scenic accessories that were to dog the remaining productions of Much Ado About Nothing (March 1931) and King Lear (April 1931) that ended Gielgud's tenure. The actors learned

eventually to compensate for these setbacks in design. When they started performances of Twelfth Night they were not adequately prepared and their projection was marred. The restless critic of The Sunday Times gave his evaluation:

During the second half of the play I stood for some time at the back of the dress-circle, and I do not think that anybody who did not happen to know by heart Viola's speech beginning 'A blank, my lord. She never told her love - ' would have been able to make out a single word of it while not one syllable of the interruptions by the tricksters during Malvolio's reading of the letter could be heard. Mr. Gielgud's enunciation is perfect, but I found when later on I visited the pit that one had to listen a little more intently than goes with perfect pleasure. His capers too, though excellent in the stalls, were a little lost on the remoter parts of the house and I think that there can be no doubt that the whole company must put up its acting one size larger. (James Agate, 12.1.1931).

The basic setting that was used consisted of a red brick terrace, with steps that served as the entrance to Olivia's house, and a musician's gallery. When the play started, Orsino was discovered lying on a couch listening to his servants playing muted violins. The gallery, together with the main staircases that led from stage to orchestra, allowed entrances and exits on two levels from the front and back. The Observer (H.H., 11.1.1931) regarded this as a mixed blessing because, while the entrances and exits had a wide vertical range, the steep ascent and descent to the main playing area also gave them a discouraging deliberation. One could see the actors coming for a long time before they were in a position to say anything. The scene of the midnight revels which Malvolio intrudes upon was executed in subdued tones of brown, grey and red. There were curtain hangings and a spinet played upon by Feste. All was bathed in a soft, wavering light that created the impression of the hearth side. Harcourt Williams kept his actors close together and restricted the amount of comic

byplay in an attempt to restore proportion to an episode that, like the play-within-a-play in A Midsummer Night's Dream, had acquired a great deal of extraneous embellishment.

The garden of Olivia's house was laid out in a reserved and formal style. Its primness antagonized one reviewer, who decided that it was ill-suited to the play's wayward spirit (Era, 14.1.1931). When the time came for Gielgud's Malvolio to be confined he was put into what was independently dubbed 'a period pill-box' (Observer, H.H., 11.1.1931), 'a sound proof sentry box' (The Times, 7.1.1931), and 'a tactlessly placed garden privy' (Four Years At The Old Vic, p.103). This anomalous erection was, in fact, Orsino's couch upended, with a roof and small grating added. Disowned by the director and disliked by reviewers for its ugliness and acoustical impracticality it stood in the centre of the stage muffling the prisoner's words. Gielgud's own idea, which he had an opportunity to carry out in 1955 when he directed Laurence Olivier in the role of Olivia's steward (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre), was to have the cell below stage level with an open trap in the floor and grille which Malvolio could put his arms and head out of. This provided Olivier with a striking entrance in the last scene when, on Olivia's command that he should be released, he came up through the floor in the middle of the gathered assembly with wisps of straw clinging to his crinkley hair and bushy eyebrows. Gielgud's pill box was less effective though it did enable Malvolio to achieve the one memorable gesture of waving his hands, like butterflies, against the upright grating. Corbin H. Wood recorded this detail along with a series of other vivid images that give a good idea of the production's fleeting, diffuse, sensuous impact.

Harcourt Williams does not try to unify Shakespearean diversity. The reds and browns of his drinking scene flicker in Rembrandtesque firelight between the prevailing greens of the rural setting; just as sadness and cruelty lurk beneath the romantic comedy of errors in Olivia's garden ... {There were} Malvolio's long

white hands flapping helplessly against the grating of his cell where he is mocked outside his prison. (Time and Tide, 17.1.1931)

The painter's use of form and colour, which this suggests, derives from the direct borrowings that were made from Van Dyck, Rubens, Rembrandt and other painters of the Dutch school.

The same theme was pursued in costuming and this produced a Sir Toby Belch in baggy breeches, turned down riding boots, a turned up moustache, pointed beard and a wide brimmed hat with a plume, who looked like the Laughing Cavalier (Time, 6.1.1931) and a black-suited Malvolio wearing a garment that recalled the narrow frock coat of the clergyman, 'a dour visaged Puritan' of the Cromwellian period (Era, 14.1.1931). When he donned his yellow stockings and put on airs for Olivia he resembled 'nothing so much as Uriah Heep gone gay' (W.A.Darlington, Daily Telegraph, 7.1.1931). This updating of the play, as instanced in the presentation of two of its main characters, to the time when social divisiveness broke out into civil war, must have given an edge to the conflict between Malvolio and Sir Toby and Gielgud's final line in the play, 'I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you' (V.1.364), may indeed have had an ominous ring to it. The Era (14.1.1931) testified to the strength and bitter profundity with which it was delivered that 'quite ... blotted out the sunny picture in the garden'. The Observer (H.H., 11.1.1931) said that the exit line was made effective through a snarling intonation.

Shakespeare's comedy is constructed around two plots based on the romantic love triangle of Olivia, Orsino and Viola and the broader, tougher comedy of Sir Toby's, Andrew's, and Maria's gulling of Malvolio. Whilst these two plots are so skilfully interwoven through the peregrinations of Cesario and Feste, amongst other means, that it is

sometimes difficult to separate them and their distinctness is perhaps only fully evident at the abstract, schematic level of analysis, there are differences of tone which a director must try to balance. Harcourt Williams's production, due to the heavy stress which had been placed on the knock-about, farcical elements in the past (Tree on his first entrance as Malvolio attended by six smaller replicas of himself had tripped on a flight of stairs) tended to underemphasize the riotous, dionysiac side of the play in favour of its lyricism. Thus characters like Sir Toby and Malvolio, who were most prone to exaggeration, were played less dominantly.

Ralph Richardson, despite his slouching, swaggering gait, maintained a sense of Sir Toby's gentlemanly good breeding to temper the sack swilling and roistering; he was 'Sir Toby without the Belch' as one critic cogently put it (Sunday Pictorial 11.1.1931). And Gielgud attempted to restore some perspective to Malvolio's fantastic airs and the gravity of his misfortunes. As a small man with large dreams who enjoyed tyrannizing over others in petty matters, he was irritatingly overbearing and made one long to see him taught a lesson. Avoiding lavish pretensions, he used small significant gestures and mannerisms such as the raising of one of his prominent eyebrows to distinguish his character. The Nation and Athenaeum, noticing this habit, described

a performance of restraint in which petty tyranny is suggested more by the lifting of an eyebrow than by pomposity of manner - but suggested so well that there seemed some excuse for the cruel punishment which it earned.

Yet this was a point that not all the critics were agreed upon. Others thought that Gielgud had preserved enough dignity and respectability as a loyal and capable manager of Olivia's household to make his punishment

unmerited. The Times (7.1.1931) made no qualification in its account of the cruelty of the conclusion arising out of the steward's persecution. Still this was a Malvolio whose discomfiture was not overwhelming because he was 'played on a low pair of stilts' (Sunday Pictorial, 17.1.1931). The London Stage (17.1.1931), illustrating Gielgud's recently won reputation as a tragedian, was not happy with his casting in an essentially comic role where 'he appeared to fall from a small not a great height'. The Universe (23.1.1931) recognized the ingenuity of the portrayal as well as a little too much deliberation in the way its effects were gained. How far was this due to playing in a larger, unfamiliar theatre which called for a grander scale of interpretation? There is evidence to show that Gielgud tried to force his voice up to the level that was required, but, in so doing, lost contact temporarily with his conception. One review related how

in odd moments John Gielgud endowed his Malvolio with the same ringing voice that helped to make his Hotspur and his Hamlet such outstanding performances, and at times this lent unreality to his otherwise refreshing reading of Olivia's puritanical steward. (Sunday Dispatch, 11.1.1931)

In the event, the production may not have achieved the sensitive equilibrium and rarity of tone that was aimed for.

It nevertheless contained some interesting and unusual performances. One of them, not so far mentioned, was Joan Harben's Olivia who clarified the incongruity of Malvolio's infatuation for her by being much younger and more sprightly than the dignified and stately countesses that audiences were accustomed to see overawing Orsino. Her immaturity accounts more readily for the headstrong and wayward attitude to her love-making and mourning, as The Times (7.1.1931) appreciated. 'Olivia's eager wooing chimes more easily with a youthful impulse than older discretion'.

Looking back over Gielgud's 1929 to 1931 seasons at the Old Vic we find two parallel themes being developed. On the one hand, these seasons represent the actor's classical apprenticeship, his introduction to the Shakespearean repertoire involving a series of débuts in major roles and some secondary ones, as well as an education in the techniques of production and the theory of Elizabethan stagecraft. It was a training course which emphasized practice a great deal and did not have time for expansive theory, but it was no less of a valuable education for that.

On the other hand, these seasons highlighted major developments in the history of Shakespearean production at a crucial phase when the ideas of William Poel, Granville-Barker, and Gordon Craig were gaining currency in the commercial theatre and becoming less and less the province of an isolated avant garde. Simplified symbolic settings, continuous action, speed and fluency of verse-speaking, the rejection of elaborate, explanatory stage business and mannered elocution were the ideas behind the new movement which had really begun at about the turn of the century with Poel and Shaw, who had even earlier attacked Irving and the Lyceum in its heyday, but it was not until after the war, when the Old Vic and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford, under the control of Bridges Adams, had become established as the two principal centres of Shakespearean production, that this movement really began to reach a wider public.

Moreover, the Old Vic's production standards were probably higher than those of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at this time. So, from the point of view of the development of Shakespeare in the theatre, Gielgud's emerging individual talents as a performer could not have picked a more suitable moment to reveal themselves. The influences that shaped his style were becoming the dominant, contemporary trends and he identified himself with them - especially through the strength of his allegiance to Barker. Although the severe economic hardships of the

thirties and the commercial triviality of the theatre at large may not, at first sight, appear to have offered promising conditions for a Renaissance of drama, they did in fact help to break down the old, established traditions and methods that held sway and enabled new ideas and institutions to gain a foothold. In this sense, the isolation of the Old Vic from the West End, like the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford, was a real advantage enabling growth.

Gielgud's opportunities too were much wider than they would have been anywhere else outside repertory. For in two years he had fourteen substantial parts in Shakespeare spanning the early comedies, early and late tragedies, the histories and the late Romances. Of Bradley's four 'Shakespearean tragedies' Gielgud had played three of the leading roles: Macbeth, Hamlet, King Lear. What is more, in Richard II and Hamlet he had given, what would become in the light of his later performances, two of his major interpretations.

The course of his development throughout the two seasons is one of increasing technical mastery and expanding ambition. After an uncertain start with Romeo, in which both he and the rest of the company displayed signs of awkwardness in having to cope with the unfamiliar demands Harcourt Williams was making upon them, he gained in confidence and power over a number of productions (Richard II, A Midsummer Night's Dream and Julius Caesar), until with Macbeth he reached a turning point and his acting assumed a grander scale, both in strength and subtlety of voice and bodily expression, that marked the grander scale of his subject. Thus, in terms of Gielgud's own artistic development, Macbeth occupied a more significant place than his much advertised portrayals of Richard II and Hamlet, though Gielgud does not seem to have been able to consolidate this achievement

later on in his own production as he did in his productions of Richard II and Hamlet. Olivier's interpretation in the Glen Byam Shaw production at Stratford was more convincing and also much more widely publicised (1955). This must have been a contributing factor to its popularity.

After Macbeth, Gielgud was ready to take on a broader range of major character roles such as Prospero, the elder Mark Antony, Malvolio, and finally, that enormous hurdle and stumbling block for actors, King Lear. True, he did not achieve total conviction in all of these parts and his explorations occasionally showed him to be outside his legitimate range, as in the case of Antony, but, in general, his acting was considered to be of sufficiently high rank to be compared to great names of the past like Benson, Irving, Tree, and Forbes-Robertson. He had become a serious contender with a proven potential.

In contrast to this upward curve, we have traced a counter-trend indicative of the exhausting claims a Shakespearean repertory can place upon a performer and have noticed the physical toll taken upon Gielgud in the straining of his voice, certain exaggerated mannerisms of inflection, aspects of bodily disguise and lapses of intensity appearing particularly towards the end of the last season. The schedule of plays at the Old Vic unquestionably made unreasonable demands upon actors and detracted somewhat from the productions, although we have to remember that limited rehearsal times and directness of approach had some advantages also. Where today could a young actor of aspiring talent go to gain the range of experience Gielgud did in such a relatively short time? Neither the Royal Shakespeare Company nor the National Theatre are in a position to offer this breadth of opportunity, however conscious they are of a debt to youthful talent. Never again, however, in a restlessly industrious career, did Gielgud attempt to pack so much Shakespeare into two years.

The other point to be observed by a sequential study of these 1929 to 1931 seasons is the marked tendency Gielgud's interpretations displayed of moving away from a romantic, *matinée-idol* image. Some of his Shakespearean roles naturally tended to exhibit this quality more than others. For example, in the parts of Romeo, Richard II, Orlando and Hamlet it was clearly of assistance to him that the appeal he had to audiences involved a personality-cult element, but he did not trade on this unduly. It is quite striking, in fact, that, where the opportunity arose to romanticise a character such as the young Mark Antony in Julius Caesar or Hotspur, he seems to have avoided it. Mark Antony's charm was specious. Hotspur drew satirical laughter down on himself. In playing Macbeth and Malvolio, Gielgud demonstrated his ability to represent tragic and comic villainy, to forge a relationship with his audience that bypassed easy, conventional sympathy. What was revealed was acting as a process of transcendence in which the performer was continually engaged in discovering an antithetical side to his recognised identity in a way that Yeats described in his theory of Masks. Yeats wrote in his diary in 1909:

There is a relation between discipline and the theatrical sense. If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves. Active virtue as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a current code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask.⁸

This is a fine description of how the seriously committed actor approaches his job.

The following chapters of this study will trace the development of Gielgud's creative imagination as he uses the discipline of his craft to

project a character image and, as a director, searches for a dramatic form that will contain a living pattern of character imagery. The layers of interpretation have accumulated gradually around the evolving roles and the individual plays in which they are set, showing how continual and life-long a process it was to discover that second self, to make the mask fit perfectly around the face of the wearer. Yet Gielgud, at the earliest phase of his association with Shakespeare plays, when he has just taken the measure of his skill as an interpreter of the classics, was already showing signs of the artistic restlessness that subdues the self and aims after complete, technical mastery.

1. Except where otherwise indicated, information on the productions discussed in this chapter is principally based on the following sources:

 Harcourt Williams, Four Years at the Old Vic
 John Gielgud, An Actor and His Time
 John Gielgud, 'One of our more promising actors', An Actor and His Time, Cassette, B.B.C. radio series.
 Roy Newquist, Showcase
 Richard Findlater, Lilian Bayliss
 The Old Vic Magazine, May 1929 - December 1930.
 The Old Vic and Sadler's Wells Magazine,
 January 1931-April 1931
 The Linguaphone Shakespeare Series: Selected
 Extracts from Shakespeare spoken by John Gielgud.
2. 'One of our more promising actors', John Gielgud talks to John Miller, An Actor and His Time, A B.B.C. radio series produced by John Powell. John Gielgud, An Actor and His Time, p.78.
3. A. E. Wilson, Star (5.10.1929), Era (16.10.1929), New Age (17.10.1929).
4. Era (16.10.1929), Sketch (J.T.G., 16.10.1929), Observer (H.H., 13.10.1929).
5. R.S.P., Daily Herald, 21.1.1930, W.A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph, 21.1.1930, Yorkshire Post, 21.1.1930.
6. The picture is reproduced in Ellen Terry's autobiography where she refers to Irving looking like 'a famished wolf' (The Story of My Life, p.303). This may be compared with a photograph of Gielgud's Macbeth in the pose he adopted in his initial entry (An Actor and His Time, p.93).
7. The case to the contrary has been argued convincingly by J.Dover Wilson amongst others (The Fortunes of Falstaff).
8. See also Yeats's poem 'The Mask' in The Collected Poems (1910).

CHAPTER TWO

RICHARD II

The style of Richard II is formal, ornate, vivid and decorous as a stained glass window in a church or an illuminated manuscript. The proliferation of puns, conceits, elaborate analogies, chanted reiterations and stylized antitheses all impart to the language a baroque splendour that occasionally borders on the grotesque.

Aumerle, thou weep'st, my tender-hearted cousin!
 We'll make foul weather with despised tears,
 Our sighs and they shall lodge the summer corn
 And make a dearth in this revolting land.
 Or shall we play the wantons with our woes
 And make some pretty match with shedding tears?
 As thus: to drop them still upon one place
 Till they have fretted us a pair of graves
 Within the earth, and, therein laid - there lies
 Two kinsmen digg'd their graves with weeping eyes. (III.3.160)

Here the verbal ingenuity quickly outstrips the dramatic incident upon which it is founded, Aumerle's weeping at Richard's abasement before Bolingbroke, and is coined into several fantastic images, the last so far fetched that it risks bathos which the speaker is only too aware of. Richard recovers himself with an embarrassed recollection of how he must appear to others 'Well, well, I see / I talk but idly, and you laugh / at me' (III.3.170), this comment perhaps also restoring the dramatic focus as Aumerle's reaction partially alienates him from sympathy. The establishment of a certain controlled distance between the audience and the emotional experience of the characters on stage does indeed seem to be part of an intentional effect that is signalled here by the telling position of the expressions 'wantons' and 'pretty match'. Both suggest an element of

selfconscious posturing as if the speaker were standing back from himself to study aesthetically the impression he was making. 'Pretty' belongs more to the vocabulary of appreciation than it does to that of deep feeling. The language therefore functions in such a way that we are prevented from achieving a complete identification with the experience that it mediates and one looks on at Richard and his world without ever being drawn completely into it whereas in the later tragedies such as King Lear and Macbeth one is on intimate terms with each of the protagonists and absorbed in their distinctive mental landscapes.¹

Richard II still possesses its own kind of persuasive integrity defined within the strict, selfcontained boundaries of the verse medium, that it inhabits. Whilst its unity of tone has probably in the past been overemphasized, the episode of the Aumerle conspiracy with its briskly robust gauche and comic resonances is an embarrassment to those critics who regard the play entirely as a lyric poem, the coherence and boldness of the imagery, the stateliness of the pageantry and ceremony together with the structural deployment of broad contrasts of character, Mowbray/Bolingbroke, Bolingbroke/Richard, and the rhythmical repetition of incidents do give the play a sustained, ritualistic, impact that has often led to its comparison with music.² Benson in his portrayal of Richard seems to have relied heavily on a chanting technique to deliver the poetry (Los Angeles Express, 27.3.1914). John Barton accentuated the symbolic and ceremonial elements at Stratford-upon-Avon to a point where stylization interfered with credibility (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1973). The part of the King requires an actor who is able to invest the prolonged arias with animation and a wide vocal range and tonal colouring to match their bravura intricacy and at the same time discover the genuineness of feeling that lies behind the swathes of verbal conceits in which Richard wraps his humanity. The success of a theatrical performance really depends upon an audience's ability to appreciate

simultaneously the sacramental pomp and show along with the linguistic artifice while also savouring the compatibility of style and speaker and the underlying clash of motives and principle.

That Richard II can be made to work in the theatre is now a fact beyond contention, yet throughout the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries it proved unpopular with audiences and was subject only to occasional isolated revivals such as those of the two Keans, Edmund (Drury Lane, 1815) and Charles (Princess's, 1815), Macready (Haymarket, 1850), and Tree (His Majesty's, 1903).³ It was not until Benson's revivals (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1896, 1899, Lyceum, 1900) that the play regained once more some of the popularity that it had held upon the Elizabethan stage and the role of Richard came to be regarded as a prestigious challenge worthy the merits of a leading performer. Since then, nourished by other cultural developments; the fresh perception of the significance of symbolism and thematic imagery within a poetic text and the rediscovery of the importance of ritual and stylization in the theatre, not the least by a number of notable performances of Richard by Maurice Evans, Ian Richardson, Richard Pasco, Paul Scofield and, of course, Gielgud himself, the play's reputation has steadily grown. Gielgud's interpretation was firmly rooted in the Benson tradition which had achieved a kind of mythic status through the dramatic criticism of C.E. Montague and James Agate, who frequently returned to his avowed mentor's historic review of a performance Benson gave in 1899. This much anthologized piece appeared originally in The Manchester Guardian on the fourth of December in the same year and fixed a standard against which, for better or for worse, the next four decades of Richards would be measured. Harcourt Williams, the director of the Old Vic production in 1929, in which Gielgud made his debut

as Richard, had himself been a member of Benson's company. It was in November 1899, just before Montague's review appeared, that Granville-Barker played the King in a production directed by William Poel for the Elizabethan Stage Society at the Lecture Theatre, Burlington Gardens, thus supplying indirectly a further precedent for Gielgud's conception. Gielgud benefitted from Granville-Barker's knowledge of the play, derived in part from his playing experience, and through their personal correspondence in 1937 when he directed the play for the second time at the Queen's. (He had directed an amateur production for Oxford University Dramatic Society in 1936). This was the last fully mounted presentation in which English playgoers had the opportunity to see him perform in the role and it is upon these two productions that the actor's reputation as Richard rests. His direction of Paul Scofield in the part at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, extends his association with the play up until 1952 and leads on to the farewell performance he gave the following year in Bulawayo, Rhodesia at the Théâtre Royale.

* * *

The revival of Richard II was the fourth production of Gielgud's first season at the Old Vic. The two previous Shakespearean revivals had been Romeo and Juliet and The Merchant of Venice, both of which had received bad notices that indicted the company particularly for gabbling. Some awareness of the auspicious nature of the fourth production was displayed in advance of its actual appearance. On the day before the performance was scheduled to start an article was printed in The Observer (17.11.1929) expressing approval for a rarely acted work and commenting on Gielgud's temperamental affinity to the leading character. As an instance of the increased esteem in which the play was already coming to be held, we find this reviewer declaring his puzzlement that, in spite of the revivals of Benson and Tree, the play was so seldom seen. He confessed that

he could not fathom the reasons for this, especially since 'Richard is one of the most interesting of all Shakespearean characters'. With an obvious debt to C. E. Montague, the article goes on to refer to Richard as 'the vacillating artist monarch' and voices some concern that the presentation will not be marred by too stiff a pace, 'the fetish for speed' having 'seriously detracted from the performances this year'.

When the production did appear it proved to be lightly mounted though attractive and colourful, moving briskly, but without any blurring of detail. The company were becoming used to each other and the style of rapid delivery that was required of them, and the director, after insisting too rigidly upon the rejection of the ponderous, elocutionary manner of speech then in its decadent state, had struck a balance between tempo and intelligibility. In collaboration with Owen P. Smyth, Harcourt Williams had devised a simple set of conventionalised castle walls and rising terraces achieved by the use of a false stage and the orchestra steps. Curtains divided the stage space for front scenes. Compared to Tree's revival which began in a sumptuous, pastoral setting, the King playing bowls with his favourites, this was meagre scenic provision indeed. But it was still possible to achieve an impression of opulent pageantry conducive to the idea of Richard's magnificent profligacy through hand-held pennants, lances and shields, a rich wardrobe and the ceremonial deportment and grouping of the players. The Morning Post (S.R.L., 19.11.1929) remarked that this was

not so splendid a show as Tree's revival. There was practically no scenic effort beyond curtains and some conventional castle-walls. But the costumes of that most sumptuous of all English periods were beautifully as well as lavishly reproduced and the heraldry was peculiarly well and carefully studied.

Much was made of the first scene and the scene of the lists that provide the director with his two principal opportunities to underwrite the august, outward ceremony of the King's administration where 'a fine panoply of escutcheons, tabards, lances, chain mail and coats of many colours' was in evidence (Daily Telegraph, 19.11.1929).

In the midst of all this was Richard, a circlet about his head to hold back his long, red hair, an earring suspended from the lobe of his right ear, a jewelled necklace about his shoulders and a crucifix on his breast.⁴ His face, thinly bearded and moustached with lined eyes extended to slits and shaded lids, had a feminine inscrutability that must have been extremely effective in promoting the enigma that surrounds the monarch - particularly in the opening scenes where he is yet to declare his character. Beneath his black velvet, belted tunic his tights displayed the curve of his leg (Plate 2). Like Cardinal Wolsey, he carried an aromatic that he applied to his nose occasionally. Eric Philips who played Bushy alongside Gielgud recorded vividly the extent of the physical realization:

I can see Gielgud now sniffing an orange stuck with cloves or striding petulantly round the stage with a riding whip. The infinite variations of his beautifully modulated voice hypnotised both audience and actors. It was an instinctive creation - this Richard II - drawing breath from inconsistency and, like all great performances, conceived by the actor not in parts but as a whole. The turn of his head, the curve of his body, the movements of his hands each told a story of their own and were beautiful to watch. Again I picture Gielgud robed in black velvet with a high collar and broad, flaring sleeves lined with white ermine. A red wig, parted in the middle, was brushed back so that the ears were partially visible. The face was pale and



2. Richard II, Old Vic, 1929

the hands - those powerfully aesthetic hands - were almost white and adorned with immense rings. Under the curves of pencilled eyebrows the eyes were set back a little by means of a faint flush of rouge. The mouth was scarlet, and its downward curves were accentuated by a wispy red moustache which curved downwards too like little lines of insubstantial red smoke. (Listener, 14.2.1957)

The text that was spoken was a very full one including the hurling down of the gages that provides a prelude to the deposition scene and the two subsequent scenes of the Aumerle conspiracy - episodes that are often cut in performance for fear of bathos. In the latter, Dorothy Green as the Duchess of York, in the second season, when the play was revived, was said to have handled her small but difficult part with skill and beauty of speech so that she succeeded in moving the audience (The Times, 11.11.1930). This suggests a serious, emotional treatment of a difficult passage that contains elements of burlesque. Harcourt Williams was conscious of the value of the scenes in breaking up the otherwise sustained focus upon Richard (Four Years At The Old Vic, p.51). A section that Alan Parsons claimed was 'ruthlessly cut' was the melancholy, wistful opening to Gaunt's expostulatory panegyric on England:

The setting sun and music at the close,
As the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last,
Writ in remembrance more than things long past.(II.1.12)

If this was cut and not simply a memory lapse on the part of the actor, then it would have left its accompanying line, 'Than they whom youth and ease have taught to glose: '(II.1.10) hanging without a rhyme. The Observer (24.11.1929) thought that both the Aumerle conspiracy and the successive martial challenges were vital and forceful although the writer's Miltonic simile creates some ambiguity as to which scene he is referring:

The clattering gusto of the lists, where the dynastic squabblers shed their gloves thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks in Vallombrosa, and those sing-song couplets in which the Duchess of York pleads for her transgressing boy were given their youthful, violent value.

The mention of the gages being hurled down 'thick as autumnal leaves' rather casts doubt on the interpretation that either the scene of the lists (1.3), where no gages are thrown, or the challenge scene, where two at the most go down, is referred to. The beginning of the deposition scene therefore seems the most likely one. On this dubious extract rests the case for assuming that the gage episode was retained in its entirety. The text was given uninterrupted except for one interval.

Shakespeare begins the action on the level of lofty solemnity with the invocation of Gaunt, who is associated with the heroic grandeur of the past and the inevitable onset of time, and by stressing the moral imperative of oath-keeping. As the play develops both these ideals will be violated, but it is important that in the acting the feeling of the natural vigour and spontaneity of human behaviour being held in check and expressed through ordained procedure should be established at once. The participation of the occupants of the stage in some sanctified and prescribed form of conduct was brought out by surrounding the King with heraldic devices, painstakingly prepared and authenticated by Michael Watts, to supply an epic statement of medieval custom. The verse was spoken in a broader more measured pace than audiences had been used to hearing at the Old Vic that season. The Stage (21.10.1929) detected a slight tendency in Bolingbroke and Mowbray to rush their lines, but added that their quarrel and the interruption of their combat had a great impact. Gyles Isham's Bolingbroke betrayed a burly audacity and stiffness of mien which contrasted with Richard's fluid grace and later Ralph Richardson as the same character, was said to display a resoluteness of purpose that did not indicate any slow

maturation of cunning (Era, 12.11.1930). Donald Wolfit's Mowbray was typically volatile whilst commanding sympathy. Wolfit doubled the part of Carlisle, a traditional piece of dual casting that has the actor who played Mowbray relate his own death in exile. The gusto of the challenges must inevitably make the King seem the more remote and Gielgud appeared to have done little to counteract this - being content to remain enigmatic. The reviewer of The Times (11.11.1930) found that Richard only inspired his full confidence after he had encountered Bolingbroke back from exile, face to face, in the scene at Flint Castle. Initially he could not trust the taciturn figure. When the actor did start to fill in some of the detail in his impersonation it was with no undue anticipation of sympathy. Apart from the fair exterior he presented which to The Daily Herald (19.11.1929) distilled the charm and frailty of the man within against the the robust vivacity of his bristling adversaries, he came across as a capricious abuser of power.

The scene of his visit to the sickly Gaunt was marred by Brember Wills's misconceived attempt to introduce mortifying symptoms into the death bed eulogy of the invalid. First night nerves may have helped to exacerbate the restlessness of delivery that employed much gesticulation and bodily movement culminating in a horrendous death rattle as Old Gaunt breathed his last. The climbing rhythms of his inspired outburst were disrupted by a palsied senility that must have obscured the speech's function as an indicator of the extent of the damage that Richard was doing to his realm. The divine inspiration under which the dying man speaks parallels that of Carlisle in his denunciation of Bolingbroke's claim to the throne and serves to establish an ideal of national and spiritual integrity that constitutes an affirmation of man's original purity of soul. England is another Eden,

'a demi-paradise', at one with God and nature. The Times (19.11.1929) reviewer could not prevent himself from watching with 'miserable fascination' Gaunt's twisting hands, his tossing head and the wriggings of his body, forgetting at the same time the magic in the words that he was speaking. Nevertheless, another critic took it upon himself to defend a reading that he conceded was unorthodox. It would be unnatural for a dying man to declaim a speech. A poignant and tender effect was achieved through the actor's avoidance of the connotations of noisy and militant patriotism (Daily Herald, 28.11.1929). Harcourt Williams was to play Gaunt to better advantage in the following year when he discovered political cunning and an old man's resentment for youth alongside his ardent patriotism, giving the exchange with Richard an additional asperity. The Observer (16.11.1930) declared that he spoke the valedictory panegyric on England beautifully and that his death was full of patriarchal power.

The turning point of Gielgud's portrayal occurred at the beginning of the third Act where the King returns from Ireland and is at once brought into focus by an image that individualizes him and links him symbolically with the natural order that he has hitherto sought to violate. Whereas Gaunt and Bolingbroke refer to their mother country (1.3.67) (II.1.51), Richard characteristically casts himself in the feminine role.

As a long-parted mother with her child
Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting
So weeping-smiling greet I thee, my earth
And do thee favours with my royal hands. (III.2.8)

It is this emotional reunion, reminiscent of Cordelia's with Lear in its mingling of sorrow with joy and its close connection with the natural properties of the earth, which strikes the minor chord that will continue to vibrate throughout the King's fall. A new and singular phase of Richard's

development has been initiated and the actor must broaden his performance to fill its suddenly increased range. In an interview with The Era (R.C., 28.5.1930), Gielgud ranked highly the episodic revelations, implying that he tried to set off the eloquence and psychological intensity of the later Richard against the remoteness and the haughty arrogance of the earlier. Having piqued and titillated the audience with his former reserve, he immediately reversed his tactics, altering the terms of the relationship between player and spectator. Asked by the interviewer which was the easiest part that he had played at the Old Vic, he replied,

For me Richard. Because of the broad changes of character, and the well-defined contrast between the beginning and the end of the play. There you have an egotistical nature expressing itself in unflinching smooth poetry, and moving from the third act to the end, with the sympathies of the audience in one concentrated mood of self-analysis and exquisite melancholy.

After he had opened up to his audience, then, he made no significant attempt to realign himself, rather prolonging the poignant mood of his eclipse. James Agate's article in The Sunday Times (24.11.1929) contains some of the most detailed criticism of, what might be called, the second movement of the play, as it also contains some of the most widely discursive commentary. The title of Agate's review is 'Half a King' and he devotes a considerable amount of space to describing that half of Richard's character exhibited by Benson and perceived by Montague which, it is his contention, Gielgud neglected, that half which shows Richard to be a self-conscious artist. The point of view of Agate was tremendously influential (his was the sole privilege of delivering weekly radio broadcasts to the nation) and is here expressed in colourful and persuasive language bristling with metaphors. But it is by no means a consensus view of the performance and is in fact explicitly contradicted by several other writers. The Morning Post's (S.R.L., 19.11.1929) observation demonstrates that the artist side of

Richard's temperament was in evidence to this reviewer.

Mr. Gielgud gave us a Richard who had just that weakness of being too much of an artist - not only with the tell-tale looking glass. He holds sympathy always as he should, but is never mawkish or puling or undignified.

The Times (11.11.1930) shows a similar awareness:

Mr. Gielgud certainly inspires confidence, and compels one to trust his interpretation, if not absolutely from the beginning of the play, at any rate as soon as he comes to the scene in the base court. Here, indeed, Richard's character is for the first time fully displayed, or at least as much as it ever is, and it is a great tribute to Mr. Gielgud that it is here that he becomes most convincing. It might well have been a temptation to take Richard as a fascinating psychological problem, and so lose his nobility, a quality apt to disappear in intricately diseased minds even when they are tragic. But Mr. Gielgud still keeps Richard's magnificence, even when the King is most obviously engaged in contemplating it, as in the scene of his deposition which was perfectly done.

Agate's statement that Gielgud did not give 'anything at all of the artist-half of Richard' though he did do justice to the elegaic half of the character is to be regarded in this context of controversy. Reviews will always differ because the writers come to the theatre with different expectations. The Montague criticism in itself, though it seems to point to something that is genuinely there in the play, was never consciously articulated by the actor, as Agate discovered when he finally tackled Benson in person on the subject.

The moment when Agate became aware of the alleged deficiency in Gielgud's performance was when Scroop enters to deliver the news of the

full extent of the rebellion in III.2. At the hint that the news is bad Richard replies:

Mine ear is open and my heart prepar'd.
The worst is worldly loss thou canst unfold.
Say, is my kingdom lost? Why, 'twas my care;
And what loss is it to be rid of care? (III.2.93)

Regarding this as the first indication that Richard indulges himself in savouring grief, Agate noted that the actor took the line in his stride, thus creating the inference that he was going to ignore this fundamental facet of the monarch's psychology. With the next scene Richard's dispositional inclination to court disaster prematurely is now given a major statement in his behaviour towards Northumberland who has been sent to declare Bolingbroke's allegiance to him provided that his banishment is repealed and his inheritance restored. As Agate points out, Bolingbroke, at this stage, appears to have no designs on the crown as such, although the boldness of his threat 'to lay the summer's dust with showers of blood/Rain'd from the wounds of slaughtered Englishmen' (III.2.43) sounds ominous - the violent imagery counterpointing his decorous action. Yet Richard, having sent a conciliatory reply back to Bolingbroke through Northumberland, instead of waiting to see how his offer is received, directly surrenders himself and his crown before any further concessions have been demanded. He thus disastrously anticipates his doom. The speech is, of course, a crucial hinge in the plot that signals the transfer of the initiative from Richard to Bolingbroke, the scene ends with the King in Bolingbroke's power asking ironically for permission to set on towards London, and it also provides an important demonstration of the innate causes determining the deposition. Shakespeare is concerned to impress upon his audience that Richard's decline is self-induced and not simply the result of external coercion by a stronger, more capable adversary. His approach may be contrasted with

that of Marlowe's in Edward II where the barons' victory over the King comes through force of arms alone. It is here, as Agate puts it, that he 'plunges his nose into the bouquet of humiliation'. It should be read, the critic suggests,

deliriously and with growing ardour, so that each successive humiliation is held to the light like a jewel, sniffed like a wine, and rolled over the tongue with gusto. The thing is a kind of descending riot ... Is it wrong to suggest that the note of all this should be relish? Richard is not only absolute for misery, but determined to get the most out of misery, and, in so far as he is an artist, exhibit the beautiful pattern he is making out of misery. Mrs. Gummidge, we remember, felt things more than anybody else. Richard is conscious not only of feeling deposition more than any other monarch, but of phrasing that feeling better than it has been done before.

Again Agate found Gielgud's delivery to be wanting in these qualities. Fortunately it is possible to supply in loose approximation what Agate omits, namely how the actor actually did approach the speech, through an analysis of a recording Gielgud made during the period he was appearing as Richard on the Old Vic stage. Lines 133 to 183 of this key section of III.3, excluding the responses of Richard's interlocutors, are included as part of his recital for the Linguaphone Shakespeare Series (1930).

There are first of all a number of minor errors that show the actor's memory of his lines to be not entirely accurate. A transposition occurs of 'now whilst' in line 158. 'With' becomes 'in' at line 165. 'There lies' is changed to 'here lies' at 168. 'Laugh' becomes 'mock' at 170 and 'calls' is turned into a singular so that it no longer matches the plural possessive of the preceding noun 'traitors'. Here the point is that Northumberland who is calling Richard to come down into the base court, is part of a collective embassy; they are all calling for him to come down as individual accomplices in treason. The passage is certainly not rendered deliriously as Agate says it should be - the tempo is too slow

and measured for that. The speaker is in no hurry to anticipate the images and he lingers over them caressingly instead. The movement is leisurely and descending, full of graceful curves and drawn out syllables. One example of this is

O that I were as great
As is my grief, or lesser than my name! (III.3.136)

where the 'O' is made into a long, quivering sigh, the voice growing to do justice to the magnitude of grief and gliding down to the final phrase so that the antithesis between 'great' and 'lesser' is charted by a wave. The trembling open vowels that are hallmarks of Gielgud's early slightly precious, approach to Shakespearean verse here serve to remind us of the vulnerable, distraught and histrionic bias of the King who is obviously on the verge of tears. Such a treatment would rapidly become monotonous if it was not varied sensitively with sharper touches to add bite and vehemency and these are to be found in the stabbing inflection given to the satirical title 'What says King Bolingbroke?' with its brittle consonants, the stiff indignation at the apprehension of the 'dearth in this revolting land' (III.3.163) and the abrupt transition from sentiment to hard rage in the postulate of an alternative site for burial, 'Or I'll be buried in the king's highway' (III.3.155). As for the growing ardour which Agate calls for when Richard asks if he must submit to Bolingbroke, there is a build up over the first four lines of this passage where each question is made to rise above its predecessor, the short sentences erected on top of one another like building blocks:

What must the King do now? Must he submit?
The King shall do it. Must he be depos'd?
The King shall be contented. Must he lose
The name of king? (III.3.143)

The tension mounts and reaches a climax with this last question as Richard quails agonizingly at the prospect of losing his title. But, instead of becoming increasingly rapturous in his despair, the tension is relaxed in the following sentence, dispersed on the protracted, melancholy 'let it go' that undercuts 'A God's name' with its low brooding pitch. The following catalogue of items that Richard will exchange for the religious artefacts of the hermit is given as a balanced antiphony with item weighed against item. When he comes to 'large kingdom' the extent of the contrast between that and the 'little grave' is figured in the drawing out of the word 'large', capturing the width and grandeur of the realm and the humble descent to the funeral plot. The colouring of the line is evidently dictated by the increasing fancifulness of the comparisons which draw further apart as the list grows. Jewels and beads, palace and hermitage are suitable correspondents, but subjects and carved saints is rather forced. The scope of the parallel of kingdom and grave takes the conceit as far as it will go. But Gielgud saves his most striking effect for the finale where he plays repeatedly upon the words 'down' and 'base' with rapid changes of pitch and emphasis to impart a swingeing, acrimonious quality to the headlong, tumbling career:

Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaethon.
 Wanting the manage of unruly jades.
 In the base court? Base court, where kings grow base,
 To come at traitor's calls, and do them grace.
 In the base court? Come down? Down, court! down, king!
 For night owls shriek where mounting larks should sing.
 (III.3.178)

The passage is remarkable for its combination of verbal complexity elicited in the cascade of puns and its vigorous muscularity that conveys, in an almost physical sense, the precipitous downward plunge of the chariot rider. The first two 'downs' with their long vowels establish the height of the fall and the accompanying reference to the base court is low and ignominious. This enables the speaker to differentiate the reiteration which is lifted up and explosively indignant as the double meaning dawns

on Richard's mind. Counterpoint is introduced into the penultimate line when, after dropping heavily on the two short questions that have a bludgeoning force, Gielgud ascends for the exclamations so that the three downs rise above one another, the soaring utterance pulling against the gravitational tendency. The swift upward inflection of the shriek of the night owls is echoed on the mention of the lark whose upward lilt is consonant with the bird's vertical trajectory and the voice finally splits with tears on 'should sing'. It may not be quite what Agate had in mind, sacrificing some of Richard's reckless zest in denigration to his elegaic acquiescence, but, on the record at least, it comes across as a viable and original interpretation that avoids the obvious pitfall of making the grief too artificial an affair. There are moments of affectation – the lingering over 'A little, little grave, an obscure grave –' (III.3.154), the triteness of the epitaph couplet 'there lies/Two kinsmen digg'd their graves with weeping eyes' (III.3.169) and the apologetic 'I see/ I talk but idly, and you laugh at me' (III.3.171) – but the character's innate nobility and genuineness of grief are never lost sight of. Probably the most important point about Agate's assessment of this section of the play is not in the demonstration of how this speech should be read, but rather its illustration of the definitive status of the Benson reading. For those who had heard Benson perform this part it was hard to conceive of it being done in any other way.

The interlude of the Queen and the Gardener separated Richard's capitulation at Flint Castle from the scene of his deposition. In 1929 this scene appears to have been played badly in spite of the Queen of Martita Hunt, who spoke consistently 'with tears in her voice' (Stage, 21.11.1929), because the supporting players were inexperienced. The Referee (24.11.1929) spoke highly of the delicacy and restraint employed by the actress, but James Agate complained that the garden scene was ruined by 'a little boy

in a beard' (Sunday Times, 24.11.1929). The Old Vic's reliance upon amateur supernumeraries to expand the company was once more in evidence and seems to have weakened the production in a number of places. In 1930 the problem was rectified and not only did Joan Harben's Queen attain an attractive pathos, Peter Taylor-Smith played the principal gardener 'to greater horticultural and philosophic advantage' (H.H., Observer, 16.11.1930).

The deposition scene was staged with full attention to its high stately solemnity, rich and bold colouring being used to give the stage a warm depth that belied the shallowness of the playing space. By most accounts this was the climactic development of Gielgud's impersonation where he assumed a loftiness of manner and tragic force that rose to the epic nature of his subject. After the noisy squabbling of the knights, a hush fell on his entrance and he came in displaying a quiet resignation that was set off against his earlier sullenness and arrogance. He had left the stage under Bolingbroke's charge with a bitter taunt on his lips:

Cousin, I am too young to be your father,
Though you are old enough to be my heir.
What you will have, I'll give, and willing too;
For do we must what force will have us do. (III.3.204)

Now his change of demeanour looked forward to the humility that he would eventually discover in his dungeon. To Eric Philips he took the stage 'irradiating an aura of pathos and tragedy' (Listener, 14.2.1957). But as the scene got underway, his voice was soon swelling again with a flood of selfpitying emotions. The phrase that Philips uses to describe his style of utterance 'rising and falling in arches' suggests a throbbing, steadily, controlled, and cumulative emphasis. When he raised the mirror to his face it was a gesture of regal dignity as well as a symbol of the King's innate narcissism and the audience were not allowed to forget his

magnificence in contemplating his whimsical pose. The silent aloofness of Bolingbroke in this scene was coloured by Gyles Isham's mannerism of tilting his chin skyward (Daily Herald, 19.11.1929). Significantly Gielgud adopted the same mannerism as he left the stage, highlighting the resemblance.⁵ With the passing on of the crown to Henry IV the two monarchs are temporarily linked through their relationship as men to the idealized image of kingship, just as their handling of the diadem, when Bolingbroke seizes it while Richard still has hold of the other side, presents their visual correspondence.

Benson had achieved a memorable effect at the completion of the investiture when the other Lords had departed and he was left on the stage alone beating time to the music of celebration. This occasioned some alteration of the Shakespearean text where Richard is called upon to leave before the stage has been generally vacated. The lines between the Abbot of Westminster, the Bishop of Carlisle and Aumerle were always cut from his productions, as was the whole of the Aumerle conspiracy. Gielgud's exit was closer to Shakespeare even if it had nothing of the Bensonian idiosyncrasy. As Henry announced his coronation the Lords all drew their swords in a salute to the new ruler. Drums struck up faintly and turned into a slow trumpet march derived from Purcel. In the context of what had just taken place the music had a hard, derisive character. Richard staggered down some steps, slowly moving for the exit, his feet dragging tiredly along the floor and his head raised regally aloft. The curtain fell on this spectacle and one assumes, since we have Harcourt Williams's assurance that the Aumerle conspiracy was staged, that the three conspirators hatched their plot on the forestage in front of the curtain, in a small sub-unit attached to the main unit of the deposition (Four Years at The Old Vic, p.51).

Richard's farewell to his Queen could not have been very striking because it is hardly glanced at by the reviews apart from some small acknowledgement of Northumberland's stern authority (Stage, 21.11.1929). York's description of the King's entry into London was perhaps not all it could have been yet it is reassuring to learn that, despite the comic elements in the discovery of his son's treachery, he retained a certain, solid dignity appropriate to a character who has to express so much of the serious moral dilemma that the transfer of power poses to the ruler's subjects (G.W.B., Era, 20.11.1929).

In his final scene in the dungeon at Pomfret Castle, Gielgud had some difficulty in managing Richard's last soliloquy with its intricate, reductive logic that leads him to the contemplation of the void of his own being. The restless assumption and discarding of a series of different identities serves only to demonstrate that Richard, having surrendered his title and office, is now without a true identity. For James Agate, the speech remained perplexing after the challenge to the attention that was made in the opening lines: 'I have been studying how, I may compare/ This prison where I live unto the world.' (V.5.1). What should have provided the ultimate insight into Richard's consciousness remained an involved, metaphysical debate. The Times (11.11.1930) gave the actor credit for a brave attempt yet found that he was defeated by the long simile of the clock in which Richard painstakingly compares himself in his sorrow to the mechanical operation of a timepiece. Here the extravagance of the simile seemed to bear no genuine relation to the mind of the individual and became merely a poetic exercise.

Responding to Gielgud's performance overall, The Times (19.11.1929) identified him as an actor of sensitive imagination with the addition that his sensitiveness made him occasionally prone to affectation. In the

part of Richard however this affectation was no longer in evidence (perhaps because Richard himself has traces of affectation in his mental make-up) and instead there had been an increase of strength and firmness. Pride and weakness were the two prime traits in this ambivalent portrait. The noble blood of the King's grandfather Edward was manifested in the visions of the dreamer. There were certain lines, the reviewer admitted, which were given a false emphasis and speeches whose meaning was clouded by monotony of rhythm, but on the whole his work showed a genuine distinction in its understanding of character and mastery of the verse. He had made the play of Richard II stand out as the loveliest of Shakespeare's histories. Yet the same could not be said of the support Gielgud had which was patchy and flawed. With the exception of Martita Hunt as the Queen who brought a clear outline to a dull little part and the steady insight brought to Bolingbroke who displayed 'a refreshing vigour of speech', the parts were indifferently played. More detail was supplied by The Observer (24.11.1929) which noted, what with hindsight one might have expected, that Gielgud was particularly good at charting the transitions of mood from exaltation to despair when Richard receives the news of his allies' desertion. Here the actor accomplished the vacillation naturally 'without turning transpontine somersaults'. There was sense as well as sensibility in his oratory and his interpretation was made doubly vivid by the way it was played off against the robust authority of Gyles Isham's Bolingbroke even though the lords and commoners of England were uninspired and dubious passages in the text remained.

The rearrangement of the cast in the following year appears to have done nothing to alter the nature of the contrast. According to The Observer (16.11.1930), Ralph Richardson as Bolingbroke played with admirable composure in a perceptive and straightforward style making it clear that, although a usurper, circumstances had been just as much to blame for his rise

to power as his own ambition. The reviewer was reluctant to add anything to his former appraisal of Richard except to note the improved technical ease and assurance with which the role was communicated. The production had made a definite improvement with a greater level of consistency and skill being displayed by actors in the minor supporting roles. The valour of the Duchess of York's rhetoric to save her son Aumerle from a sentence for treason was conveyed with a discretion that justified King Henry's clemency. The latest review of The Times (11.11.1930) confirmed the impression of a more evenly competent company that distributed interest beyond the immediate boundaries of the central character conflict. Even so, Richard emerged as a more isolated figure than any of Shakespeare's heroes apart from Hamlet, in his self-absorption.

Between this and Gielgud's next appearance as Richard in a production of his own devising in 1937, there occurred his début in a modern play about the historical King Richard entitled, elliptically, Richard of Bordeaux (1933) – not Richard of England or King Richard; Richard is estranged from the country over which he rules. This play (by Elizabeth Mackintosh under the pseudonym of Gordon Daviot) marked Gielgud's début as a professional director.⁶ After a short trial run at the Arts Theatre, it was transferred to the Queen's where it played to large West End audiences and subsequently toured the country. The production's commercial success marked the peak of Gielgud's fame as a *matinée* idol as well as supplying him with the financial backing he needed for the season of classic plays with a single company at the Queen's which Richard II premiered. The direct and incisive contemporary dialogue of Richard of Bordeaux and its pacifist ideology struck a responsive chord in many 'thirties playgoers and promoted Gielgud's association with Richard amongst a much wider public than the small, in some ways elitist, audience that had seen his Shakespearean performance at the Old Vic. Comparisons were made between the two writers' different treatments of the same theme

which lent an additional interest to both plays and invested the personality of the King with a fresh topicality.

* * *

Gielgud's second appearance as Richard II, this time in his own production, was one in a season of plays under his management. Actors who were engaged to play in Richard II were also assured of parts in The School for Scandal, Three Sisters and The Merchant of Venice. It was therefore possible to cast players of higher merit than usual in small roles since they could look forward to bigger parts in the other plays. This explains the unusual strength of the cast that had been assembled for Richard II. The cast included Anthony Quayle (the Duke of Surrey and the Welsh Captain), Leon Quartermaine (Gaunt), Harcourt Williams (the Bishop of Carlisle), Peggy Ashcroft (the Queen), Alec Guinness (Aumerle, the Groom), and Michael Redgrave (Bolingbroke). The repertory idea was, of course, not a new one, but it had not been tried before in the West End with Shakespeare and so fresh ground was being broken when Richard II opened the Queen's season. Gielgud explained some of the other advantages and hazards involved in a self-financed repertory season in an interview with Theatre World (August 1937) that served as advanced publicity for the venture:

The strain of playing in long runs is not only intense, but death to the art of an actor. I hope to have solved the question by the way in which we planned this season, the most stimulating thing about repertory is the keenness with which everyone is possessed. Rehearsing for the next play while appearing in the present one prevents any danger of staleness. Then, too, the fact that six months continuous work is assured prevents financial worries and leads to a feeling of security that allows everyone to concentrate on the job in hand.

It is not easy to ensure the financial success of such a venture. One might budget carefully to get one's production costs back in the eight or ten weeks run but this problem is not impossible to overcome. I intend to resist the temptation of continuing the run of a play beyond the fixed period, even though it is playing to capacity at the end of that time, for if public interest is as great as that, it will continue to be so in the event of the revival of the play at some future date.

The décor that Motley produced was elaborate, being rich in colour and detail and lavishly ornamented. It retained the patent artificiality of their earlier work, but was neither as simple nor as light. 'We have based our modern interpretation of the fourteenth century on pictures of the period, and have tried, with the costumes to help the actors to express the characters they represent. We have aimed at a richer, coarser and heavier effect than that of Richard of Bordeaux' they told Richard Clowes in The Sunday Times (5.9.1937). Neither had they followed the plan for the O.U.D.S. production which they had also designed in using a permanent structure, the screens, turrets and pilasters that they used instead produced a more diffuse impression. The scenes had to be changed and this led to the curtain being brought down many times during the course of the play and orchestral interludes being introduced. The play had two intervals of ten and eight minutes. There was, for example, a kyrie eleison chanted off stage after Gaunt's death. Herbert Menges the musical advisor, deciding that the music of the fourteenth century was too primitive for modern ears, had attempted to incorporate an archaic element into his own compositions and contrast the characters by devising distinctive fanfares for them. Partitions of various kinds were brought in to break up and define space. The dying Gaunt sat in front of a partition alternately patterned with dark crosses on a light background and light crosses on a dark background. Another was spangled with five-pointed stars. In III.2 where Richard returns from his Irish wars, a stunted tree upon a hillock and a rude wicker fence carried a suggestion of the 'high

wild hills and rough uneven ways' of Gloucestershire (II. 3.4). Steps (in this case with plant pots arranged along them) were used in the garden scene, reflecting in a general fashion the currency they had gained in the theatre through the designs of Gordon Craig and the productions of Jessner and Komisarjevsky. To eavesdrop on the conversation of the gardeners the Queen hid behind a floral arbor. James Agate epitomized the reactions of many reviewers in finding the scenic invention here, as elsewhere, excessive:

All that is needed for the Duke of York's garden is a back-cloth and a bush, the latter because of the Queen's 'Lets step into the shadow of these trees'. Even the 'dangling apricocks' can be off-stage. But this does not satisfy Motley, who must have a scene exactly like a model of Dorothy Vernon's steps at Haddon Hall set inside a West End florist's. Plants in pots are exhibited on Dorothy's steps looking like stages, and so that you can almost see the dangling price tickets. The queen, hieing her to shelter, hides behind something that looks like a floral cash desk. To cap the lot the gardener, promising himself to set a bank of rue, chooses a spot at the immediate foot of the steps, so that we can visualise a line of infant Dukes of York toddling down them, only to trip over the sour herb of grace, and fall on their baby noses. (Sunday Times, 12.9.1937).

The Queen's Theatre did not have a very deep stage and its shallowness exacerbated the occasionally cluttered and two dimensional effect of the tableaux.

Costumes were equally decorative and ostentatious. Their variegated colours and modish extravagance was a decisive factor in building up a sense of a historical court preoccupied with fashion and show. The cut of doublets lent emphasis to the shoulder line, broadening and stiffening the attitudes of the knights that surrounded the slim and elegant King. Motley went back to Holinshed for the heraldry of the lists, identifying the participants through distinctive emblems such as the lion and the swan.

The Duke of Hereford's historical insignia was golden swans and antelopes on a field of green and blue velvet. The Duke of Norfolk's was mulberry trees and lions of silver on a crimson velvet field. Shoes with curling, pointed toes were worn in black, red and turquoise. Clothes were scalloped at the neck and waist. The women wore elaborate head dresses and heavy make-up which emphasized their foreheads. Peggy Ashcroft as the Queen was white faced with prominent dark lips and eyes. When she went with Richard to visit Gaunt she wore a wide-brimmed riding hat with pompoms around the edge. Elsewhere she wore a crown and a white dress with golden plumes and jewelled buttons that hung low on the shoulder to show off her throat and neck. Though she has little to say outside of the three scenes of lamentation for her husband (II.2, III.4, V.1), Gielgud had taken pains to demonstrate her significance through his visual tableaux. Invariably when she was on the stage she occupied a key position, even when her presence was not called for by the action. At the Coventry lists she sat alongside the King framed in their pavilion, an appearance that anticipates Shakespeare's introduction of her in II.1 at Gaunt's death bed (Plate 3). In this later episode while she has only a single line to speak, she was allowed to come forward and kneel beside Gaunt's chair, placing a hand on his chest, thus establishing a compassion that implies criticism of her husband's callousness. She was attended by three doll-like women. (Shakespeare calls for two attendants in the garden scene). One of these women carried a tasselled sunshade which she used to shelter her mistress. In his interview with Richard Clowes, Gielgud made special mention of the Queen and their rehearsal discovery of her relevance to the structure of the whole.

I was worried at first because my leading lady, Miss Ashcroft appeared to have a poorish part in the first play of our season, but at rehearsals we have discovered that the role of the Queen, though small, is cunningly distributed in the play, and is an attractive contrast to the martial atmosphere of the other scenes. (Sunday Times, 5.9.1937).



3. Richard II and Queen, Queen's, 1937

Richard, in the earlier scenes, dressed in a long, quilted surcoat embossed with metallic stars with a high collar and split up the front to reveal his legs. The sleeves rayed out in a profusion of scallops. The surcoat was held in at the waist by a broad leather belt with a fleur de lys buckle. Fleurs de lys were also featured in the design of his crown and square-backed throne. They stuck up from the diadem and sprouted from the upright supports of the royal seat. On the first finger of his right hand was an escutcheon-shaped ring and on his chest the crucifix ornament he wore at the Old Vic was replaced by a sun badge in a reversion to the more pagan symbol. At the lists a white cloak edged and patterned with gold was thrown over his shoulders and complemented the Queen's white and gold outfit. Later, back in England, after suppressing the Irish, he discarded his brilliant attire for a dark cloak and plain monkish habit with wide turned up sleeves and wore chain mail about his neck. The austerity of the garment immediately asserted his status as a religious martyr. His hair was shorter than it had been in 1929 and cut in a fringe in a style worn by other male members of the company. The thin, curling moustache and beard and the pencilled, curving eye brows and dark lids once more recreated that peculiar expression of eastern remoteness and androgynous sensuality. A jester made up part of the King's retinue in pointed shoes, a fringed jacket and coxcomb with bells at his ankles and one sewn to the tip of his headpiece.

The text which was performed was not as full as the Old Vic version. Writing about possible cuts, Gielgud affirms their advisability in places where the poetry is traditionally regarded as weak.

The quarrel of the peers, before the entrance of Richard in the deposition scene, is difficult to stage without a dangerous risk of seeming ridiculous (the throwing down and picking up of gloves and so on), and it is advisable to make some discreet cuts to avoid bathos both here

included. (Stage Directions, p.33)

However, the Aumerle conspiracy was not included in this production and Gielgud's instinct as a director was always to leave this out even though he appreciated the stylistic break entailed by a different kind of verse composition. When asked about the place of this episode in the revivals he had directed, he replied in a little more detail.

I think I cut the scenes on all these occasions - only retaining the few opening speeches about Bolingbroke's entry into London. They seem very childish scenes and get laughs in the wrong places. (Perhaps fitted in to fill time when the Abdication scene was banned) (A letter to the writer, 7.6.1980)

Beneath the formal symmetry and the bold setting forth of the conflict of the knightly challengers in set, rhetorical speeches, the first scene of Richard II contains an ambiguously perplexing subtext. Some of this, it is probably true, was less perplexing to an Elizabethan audience, who were more familiar with the quasi-historical background through plays such as the anonymous Woodstock, yet from the perspective of whatever age we try to view the opening events of the tragedy, it is impossible to deny a genuine element of ironic reticence that offsets the solemn directness and the stirring ardour of the quarrel. Shakespeare begins in medias res with the decisive event of the murder of Woodstock having already happened and the knightly integrity of the duellists' attitudes wrapped up in protocol, belying the complexity of their real motivations and feelings.

We thank you both; yet one but flatters us,
As well appeareth by the cause you come;
Namely to appeal each other of high treason (1.1.25)

says Richard, drawing attention to the discrepancy between ceremony and sordid fact. Moreover, the opposition of the two armed figures that we are invited to contemplate does itself, through hints and veiled suggestions, point to the opposition of Bolingbroke and Richard which becomes the central conflict of the play after Mowbray is banished. The open antagonism of the duellists is an airing in public of a deeper dissension in the realm that stems from the King's guilty secret of Gloucester's murder. To make this furtive quality dramatically explicit Gielgud interpolated approximately a minute's silence before speaking the opening words that instigate the judicial proceedings, in which time looks were exchanged and the characters were grouped in conspiratorial huddles. The setting, despite its sombre opulence and the presence of a throne, was not like the main audience chamber of a palace, but instead a type of annex where suitors were detained. Richard himself occupied an unobtrusive position at the side of the platform, taking up the throne subsequently to hear the charges of the appellants. Peter Fleming described the ominous overtones that were created:

When the curtain goes up ... there before us, true and suggestive, is the court: an anteroom, darkly splendid but above all a place for waiting about in, shot with fears and ambitions and jealousies, heavy and violent with glances and encounters and withdrawals and the things these portend (Night and Day, 16.9.1937).

Yet Granville-Barker in his private correspondence with Gielgud, criticized the actor's self-effacement:

I applauded you at first sight for so unselfishly hiding yourself in a corner. But I fear you were wrong to do so. I fancy W.S. thought of the scene as a meeting of the Privy Council - Richard presiding (the P.C. and the Star Chamber, the King absent, were the courts of the day for State affairs) probably raised on a dais at the end or centre of the table,

formally presiding. And after letting the discussion rip - and actually I daresay, playing cup-and-ball or reading Froissart or the New Yorker during the dull parts. But the point is that while W.S. doesn't begin to write Richard till he comes back from Ireland (till he becomes himself and not merely a King), he does keep one guessing and wondering what sort of a man he is up to that point, and what the devil he will do next. and the more we see of his cryptic fact the better. (Letter to John Gielgud, 15.10.1937)

Gielgud was to remember Granville-Barker's advice when he came to direct Paul Scofield as Richard in 1952.⁷

Near to Richard were his favourites Bushy, Bagot and Green and on Bolingbroke's rather generalised charge that Mowbray,

did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death
Suggest his soon-believing adversaries
And consequently, like a traitor coward,
Sluic'd out his innocent soul through streams of blood.
(1.1.100)

there was an uncomfortable, sidelong glance between the King and his henchmen to show their implication in the deed. The favourites were gaudily dressed and Harry Andrews, in particular, who played Bushy, wore a sinister make-up with a dark hat and beard and a snaky forelock. It had been decided that he was the chief corrupting influence at the court and that Bagot and Green, who was the elder of the other two, were sycophants. Gielgud wanted to differentiate these characters, who are very much alike in the text, and reinforce the supposition that Richard's taint derived from association with them rather than innate evil, adding weight to Northumberland's diagnosis: 'The King is not himself, but basely led/By flatterers,' (II.1.241). The careers of Bushy, Bagot, and Green were brought to a climax in II.2 when the news of Bolingbroke's landing in England was received by the Queen. It is here, after Northumberland's secret conference with Ross and Willoughby at the end of II.1, that the world of

action breaks in rudely upon the world of rarefied emotions and linguistic artifice. A strong dose of realism was injected into Gielgud's production at this point that exposed the shallowness of Bushy as he degenerated into hysteria when Green brought the news of the enemies' arrival. In contrast to the elaborate courtesy and formal wordplay conducted like a game at the beginning, the scene moved to the 'intimate stop-press quality' of Green's announcement of the lordly rebels and ended in a confusion that demonstrated 'the shifting, treacherous quality of the age and their awareness of it' (Peter Fleming, Night and Day, 16.9.1957). The three favourites were unable to cope with the real emergency. Harry Andrews commented:

I think it did become a very good scene and it was because of the hysteria in the feeling, in the moment they were caught. It was this feeling of panic and fear which I think was very effective and I think John got us to do that very well. Bushy having been very much in command of the whole situation became like many villains do, somewhat hysterical.

Interviewer: It sounds to me as if there was this sinister quality underlying the pageantry and the spectacle.

It was sort of black and ugly yes.
(Harry Andrews interviewed by the writer, 5.3.1980)

Along with the glance he exchanged with his favourites when Bolingbroke refers to Gloucester's death, Gielgud tried to show Richard's inward wariness in other ways. He thinks that the King should appear,

to be ever physically on his guard, shielding himself, both in words and movement, from the dreaded impact of the unknown circumstances which, he feels, are always lying in wait to strike him down. He is torn between the intrinsic weakness of his nature and the pride and fastidiousness of his quality and breeding. He strives continually to retain his kingly dignity, to gain time by holding it up to the light before his enemies (as he will actually hold up the mirror later on in the deposition scene), while he prepares inwardly to face the shock of the next humiliation (Stage Directions, p.29)

But how exactly was the decision he made about the subtext expressed in the concrete language of movement and gesture from the stage? Richard's lips curled; he was petulant and his eyes shone with a sombre light that reflected 'the instinctive knowledge of the sordid doom that is to overtake him' (Evening Standard, 17.9.1937). He seemed to shrink from the assertiveness of the challengers. Yet Gielgud's acting was not as lucid as his description and was open to misinterpretation. Philip Page thought that Richard had been wrongly turned into a physical coward, bullied by Mowbray and Bolingbroke's toughness (Sphere, 18.9.1937)). The Times (17.9.1937) detected some unnaturalness in Richard's frequent smiles as if Gielgud was over-anxious to demonstrate the King's frailty and charisma.

There are certain clues in the text that, on record, Gielgud used to suggest Richard's frame of mind: the business-like dismissal of flattery with its tetchy impatience to get on,

We thank you both; yet one but flatters us
As well appeareth by the cause you come; (I.I.25)

The note of apprehension in,

How high a pitch his resolution soars! (I.I.109)

This was an aside, spoken reflectively as an intimate self-accusation. At the other extreme, Richard Pasco made it boldly rhetorical, chafing with an irony that was directed towards the whole assembly.⁸ Then Gielgud displayed sarcastic humour belittling the quarrel:

Forget, forgive; conclude and be agreed:
Our doctors say this is no month to bleed. (I.I.156)

Finally, there was a hint of timidity in the assertion of the royal prerogative:

We were not born to sue, but to command;
Which since we cannot do to make you friends, (I.I.196)

For the scene of the lists, Richard was prominently displayed alongside his Queen in an open pavilion on a raised level. This was big enough to contain other spectators besides the royal couple, including the favourites and many of the court. Behind the pavilion stretched a blue cyclorama. There was pageantry in the spectacle of the two fully armoured knights, the bringing on of their lances, the blare of trumpets and the offstage neighing of their steeds as they set forward to the combat. However, the effect relied on no large, drilled bodies of actors or extensive management of weaponry and the undoubted visual appeal that it did have was the result of skilfully blended colouring and suggestive detail. A single flag was all that rippled in the sky. Simple fold-up stools were used as seats. The airy spaciousness was similar to the atmosphere of Richard of Bordeaux. The bright hues of the composition were set off by the sombre tones of the first, indoor scene and constituted a variation upon the darker, richer background of the production overall. Audrey Williamson described this scheme of colour:

The colouring was dark and at times beautiful, but infinitely the most successful scene, pictorially, was the 'tourney' in which the artists set the King and Queen, in a splash of white and gold, like two superb jewels against the pallid azure of the sky. Only one fluttering pennant broke the expanse of egg-shell blue; one was conscious of height above an arena, and purely by suggestion, of the pageantry of the lists below (Theatre of Two Decades, pp. 53-54).

In addition to the white, blue and gold there were traces of black, red and turquoise (A.P., Manchester Guardian, 7.10.1937).

Gaunt's death finalizes the collapse of the old order and the disintegration of national unity. Leon Quartermaine, with long, white hair brushed backwards and a beard and staff, sat in a chair to deliver his threne on the destruction of England. The loose, dark surplice that he wore combined with the other details of his appearance to give him the look of a biblical prophet corresponding to his explicit identification with the role (II.1.3). His figure stood out against a screen which was placed behind him. Near to his left was a table and further away, on that side, a candle in a stand contributed to the pallid, twilight evocation of the death bed. The scene was dimly illuminated. York, his companion, was shabbily dressed in a manner that perplexed Granville-Barker (Letter to John Gielgud, 15.10.1937). However, this seems to have been intended as part of the characterization of an old man forgetful in attire as well as in his political allegiance. (He cannot find his boots when he wishes to ride to the court to disown his son.) Bringing many touches of humour to the part, which supplied relief to a play otherwise steeped in the melancholy poignancy of its hero, he, nevertheless, retained his moral authority and was often singled out (Herbert Farjeon, Bystander, 22.9.1937, Teacher's World, 22.9.1939). The Jewish Chronicle (10.9.1937) caught the ambivalence of his personality in its description of him as 'an English Polonius' - echoed incidentally in Granville-Barker's letter. The impact of Leon Quartermaine's Gaunt was marred slightly by some inaudible speaking by the Duchess of Gloucester when she solicited him to revenge her husband's death. He chose not to deliver the England speech in the orotund, grand manner trying to capture instead the pathos and anguish of the dying patriot whose ideals were being betrayed. The actor's naturally silky

and lyrically sensitive voice would have lent itself to this approach. Anti-nationalist and militant feeling at the time often qualified the reception of Gaunt's speech with its glorification of a martial code of chivalry and foreign conquest. The pacifist ideology of Richard of Bordeaux was much more in keeping with the period (Teacher's World, 22.9.1937). The Morning Post (7.9.1937) thought that Quartermaine's quieter, more informal style underplayed the rhetoric too much and partly blamed the staging for the failure.

{Quartermaine} gave the great speech on England not as a 'prophet inspired', but in conversational fashion, sitting at a table. This robbed it of all its rhetorical splendour. It was like an organ solo played on piano.

Perhaps the table was redundant, but the straight-backed chair in which Gaunt sat, as opposed to the litter he was to lie on in 1952, allowed the actor to balance his head gracefully in a way that helped to communicate the tenor of his reading. The Stage (9.9.1937) saw, in his treatment, an attempt to unite the frailty of the man with the rigour of his conviction and was content to sacrifice some of the speech's prominence as a set piece for its heart-felt truthfulness. Gaunt spoke with 'the flickering fire of soul and halting breath of one at his last. What is lost in rhetoric is gained in artistry and deeper meaning'.

When Richard came in, wearing a pair of light riding gloves, attended by his richly clothed favourites and the Queen, in a flamboyant hat, their opposition to the two dully dressed old men was apparent at once. Gielgud stood in profile, to the left of Gaunt, chafing under his rebukes while the Queen kneeled compassionately on his right. Bushy, Bagot and Green looked on impassively from further left, behind their sovereign. After Gaunt had

been carried off to die, some mime to indicate mourning was inserted with the participants making the sign of the cross and kneeling to pray as a hymn was sung off - 'damn all that crossing and genuflection and Dies Irae' wrote Granville-Barker (Letter to John Gielgud, 15.10.1937).

The brief colloquy between the three lords that ends this scene saw the emergence of Northumberland as a separate figure. Gielgud called it 'a choral exercise for three voices' and suggested that this is how the scene should be played (Stage Directions, p.33). The Northumberland of Henry Wolston had a hard physiognomy and a certain jaunty, contemporary air. 'He seemed to have just looked in from the club to do a bit of plotting before getting into plus fours and motoring out to Huntercombe for a round of golf', wrote Philip Page (*Sphere*, 18.9.1937), which may explain the drollness which was attributed to him elsewhere (A.D., Manchester Guardian, 7.9.1937). Another reviewer referred to him as 'a White Russian officer' - earlier in the same article he had complimented the company on its compact integrity and smoothness of texture which was like that of a Russian ensemble (Peter Fleming, Night and Day, 16.9.1937). Northumberland's costume and the actor's way of wearing it suggested he was in uniform and this agreed with his actions as an agent of Bolingbroke, if it was slightly disconcerting. His dignity and punctiliousness were compatible with the communication of the diplomatic message to Richard at Flint Castle, his insistence that the petition containing the King's crimes should be read out and his despatch of Richard and the Queen upon their separate journeys to exile and imprisonment.

Another choric commentator who was carefully picked out, was the Welsh Captain. The fact that his part is mentioned at all says something for Anthony Quayle's skilfull interpretation which struck the correct balance between fear and objective detachment. Holding a lantern, he spoke

in hushed tones of awe that promoted an unsettling mood of suspense and supernatural mystery. Gielgud likens this scene to the one in Macbeth where the murderers await the coming of Banquo (Stage Directions, p.21). The first image in that scene is of the closing in of the night:

The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day;
Now spurs the lated traveller apace
To gain the timely inn, and near approaches
The subject of our watch. (III.3.5)

Banquo enters, calling at once for a light. Earlier on, Ross has woven these two thematic strands together in his observation that 'dark night strangles the travelling lamp' (II.4.7). In the Welsh Captain's scene the introduction of a lantern evokes a similar pall and lends resonance to the nocturnal imagery gathered there. We hear that 'meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven;', 'the pale fac'd moon looks bloody on the earth' (II.4.9) (II.4.10) as well as of a shooting star and a sunset. The gloom of the stage lighting worked with the poetry to forecast symbolically the sun King's eclipse. The episode receives mention in Night and Day (Peter Fleming, 16.9.1937), The Manchester Guardian (A.D., 7.9.1937) and The Theatre of Two Decades (Audrey Williamson, p.55).

The importance of the Welsh Captain's scene (II.4.) is that it keeps alive the idea of Richard's royalty while the spotlight is focused upon Bolingbroke. Its placing is significant in that the previous scene (II.3.) has dealt with York's capitulation to Hereford and the following shows Bolingbroke, restored to his titles, pronouncing sentence on Bushy, Bagot and Green. The rich elegiac tone of the Welsh Captain's speeches strikes the florid, melancholy note that we will come to associate with Richard in his decline and, in so doing, prepares for his return from Ireland. Because the

Welsh Captain's scene was so strongly presented, then, the audience was already disposed towards feeling sympathy for the King and Gielgud's task of acting the return was made so much easier.

When Richard returned from Ireland, Gielgud allowed himself the opportunity to luxuriate in the pathos and beauty of his long speeches. He stood next to a rude hurdle and a stunted tree with bare, leafless branches looking as if he had just stepped from shipboard after a long, hard journey (Photograph, 'On Stage and Screen', The Sphere, 18.9.1937). His face was drawn; he had a drab cloak thrown over his shoulders and a dull surplice, wide at the sleeves and sweeping the ground. There was a dull gleam of chain mail at his neck and his head was bare, as if he had already relinquished his crown.

The bleak stage picture must have thrown into relief the rich flood of poetic imagery that escaped from the King's lips. Gielgud's voice was particularly subtle in the variety it lent to the lines, at one moment dropping to a soft murmur and at the next swelling to a full sonority. Yet, although attention was focused primarily on the words, the movement of his hands and face added a visual dimension:

Mr. Gielgud's face growing more and more haggard with his eager woe, his voice ranging from a moving whisper to the highest pitch of his unavailing imperiousness and most of all his hands, modelling the lines as they were delivered and in themselves poetical, suave and regal - these attributes made the character a shining monument to sorrow. (A.D., Manchester Guardian, 7.9.1937)

This quotation, with its reference to Gielgud's hands 'modelling the lines as they were delivered' suggests, perhaps an element of stylization in his gestures.

At this point Richard started to attract the sympathy he had forgone in the earlier scenes. Other actors, The Morning Post (7.9.1937) observed, had tried to temper the aloof enigma of Richard's early appearances. Tree had shown 'a soft dreaminess'; Maurice Evans had been 'gracious'; Gielgud, on the contrary, was severe, cold and unlikeable. But after the 'Let's talk of graves,' speech (III.2.145) - probably the highlight of the scene - all was 'sheer poignancy and beauty'.

The appearance that Richard makes on a higher level in the next scene led to the erection of a mock-castle. There were stylized battlements from which the King could look down on the rebels and from which he would later descend. This castle was one of the pieces of scenery that was most heavily criticised for its superfluous elaboration and it is referred to variously as 'a pepper box' (Lionel Hale, News Chronicle, 7.9.1937), 'a canvas-castle' (New Statesman and Nation, 11.9.1937), 'a semi-realistic mock castle' (Ivor Brown, Observer, 12.9.1937) and 'turreted towers and screens' (P.G.F., Time and Tide, 11.9.1937). It may also have had a port-cullis. The stonework was embellished with ornaments. It quite plainly possessed many of the features of a real castle and the problem seems not to have been one of recognition, but simply of an incongruous mixture of stylized and naturalistic details. Gielgud was trying to hit on a compromise between décor that was merely subservient to the verse and décor that provided a complementary visual appeal. The flamboyance and artificiality of the scenery was a direct response to the voluptuousness and the exuberant, pictorial artistry of Shakespeare's language. However, in the event, the eye-catching flair of the director's tableaux here and there overwhelmed the less obvious poetic realization of incidents. The Birmingham Post (7.9.1937) implies in addition that the castle's failure was in part a mechanical one since it made the staging of the scene difficult. Was this because it took up too much room?

Despite these drawbacks, enough remained in the power of the acting to carry the episode through. The meeting between Richard and Bolingbroke was crucial to both Gielgud and Redgrave in the clarification of their lines of motivation. Having won York over to his side and executed the King's favourites, Bolingbroke's avowal that he has returned only to restore justice and reclaim his inheritance is put to a severe test when he encounters the King in person. Michael Redgrave preserved his aura of sincerity whilst making it apparent on what a knife edge the wronged Duke was standing. If the course of the scene, with the surrender of Richard and the march onwards to London, suggests that, whatever resolutions he may take, Bolingbroke is as much impelled to go on absorbing power as his rival feels bound to yield it, then Redgrave nevertheless showed that his character's intentions were honest. The Stage (9.9.1937) detected the note of truth and sincerity in his offer to lay down his arms if his repeal was granted. The Jewish Chronicle (10.9.1937) would in fact like to see more cunning and faithless cynicism in his behaviour, but then the text arguably does not support such a reading. The Horse and Hound (10.9.1937) testified to the unlikeable traits of dogmatism, bombast and ruthlessness that the actor embodied. There were, as well, hints of a troubled conscience. Yet for Bolingbroke to be simply lying when he says,

Henry Bolingbroke
 On both his knees doth kiss King Richard's hand,
 And sends allegiance and true faith of heart
 To his most royal person; (III.2.35)

drastically curtails the rich ambivalence of his dilemma. Redgrave's Bolingbroke had more depth than that, for it was 'a subtle study of a complex character' (Horse and Hound, 10.9.1937). Thus the precise declaration of

the mutual rights of subject and ruler was a moral touchstone for his performance.

James Agate in 1930, had averred that the touchstone for Richard was his 'What must the king do now?' speech (III.3.143) where he reveals a determination to destroy himself. Writing in John O'London's Weekly (17.9.1937), Agate again took up cudgels on C.E. Montague's behalf, returning to this important passage. The gist of Agate's criticism was that Gielgud's Richard was a profounder, more intricate, study than it had been in 1930 and this was because, although, in the first half of the play, he did nothing to indicate the artistic temperament of the King, he was now, in the second half, after Richard's return from Ireland, taking it more into account. (Compare his article in The Sunday Times (12.9.1937) where he wrote: 'It is eight years since this well graced actor first essayed the part; his present performance lays greater stress on the artist without losing any of the kingliness. His reading has gained in depth, subtlety, insight, power'.) This was correct. Gielgud had taken Agate's criticism to heart and was now modelling his performance, in part, on Benson's reading as it was described by Montague, at the same time trying to preserve the integrity of his own interpretation. This is what he told Granville-Barker in the course of their correspondence about the present production. But even though Agate acknowledged the aesthetic consciousness that enriched Gielgud's playing he still thought that the actor was delivering the crucial speech incorrectly. 'The speech should be given haltingly, fumblingly like a man groping after invention. Mr. Gielgud delivers it as fluently as Lear's "Come, let's away to prison".' Agate missed, at this point, if not elsewhere, the impression that Richard is glorying in his downfall and that his exquisitely expressed emotion is 'exquisitely bogus'. Gielgud, on the other hand, appealed to the very

same Montague/Benson tradition when Granville-Barker urged him to speed up his playing, especially in relation to this passage. In this incident the self-feeding nature of the Benson tradition and the problems of its interpretation are exhibited! Granville-Barker's reply attempted to set it in proportion:

First to clear away that Benson business. B. was good and God knows he wasn't always, and he did let the thing carry him away - though still and progressively not at the pace it might have. But if he played the 'jewels ... beads' passage slowly it was probably because he could not remember the words ... And Montague was a good critic; but I doubt if he had much technical knowledge; nor perhaps has Agate - good Shakespearean critic though he is - about the best among the few I read - as much as perhaps he thinks. And his criticism now lapses rather often into the 'This sort of thing gives me the pip ...' method. And after all, for a foundation of criticism technical knowledge is needed. Don't let him worry you. And don't let me worry you either. (Letter to John Gielgud, 19.9.1937).

Gielgud complied with Granville-Barker's advice and knocked eight minutes off the production's playing time. The encouragement he was given to pursue his own interpretation came at a valuable moment when the pressure to conform to someone else's concept was strong.

The deposition scene was built around a throne, in the centre raised on a dais. It was brilliantly lit so that when Bolingbroke sat there he shone like the sun. This contributed to the effect of Richard's metaphorical description of his adversary:

O that I were a mockery king of snow,
 Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke
 To melt myself away in water drops! (IV.1.260)

Audrey Williamson felt that the tableau emphasized the power-seeking motive of the new King while admitting that in his taciturnity he seemed to be repressing this urge (Theatre of Two Decades, p.55). There was evidently a tense and highly charged quality that was radiated by his aloof and silent presence which referred back to the suspense and enigma that Richard's own original appearance in state had awoken. Henry IV had none of the old King's charisma and artistic imagination, but his practical resourcefulness inspired this reviewer's faith in the peace and strong government that his reign would bring. The Times (7.9.1937) was less optimistic about the next ruler's qualifications, though its comments provide collaborative testimony on the eloquence of the mime. Much stress was placed upon the clarity of exposition in the early scenes which, when the actor fell silent, came back in retrospect to fill the vacuum:

The opening is made lively by ... Mr. Michael Redgrave's introduction to a study of Bolingbroke so steady and lucid that, when at last he is silent on his throne, the silence is illumined by knowledge of him - his ruthlessness, his uncertain desire to be honest, his conflicting conscience.

Contrary to Redgrave's immobility, Gielgud used movement to convey his character's state of mind. Richard spoke from below, ranging freely about the stage in an aimless trance, coming in to perform such particular pieces of business as his offer of the crown to his successor and the sudden snatching it away. Granville-Barker thought that this action and the accompanying plastique was admirable, yet he did not think that Gielgud had found the right tune for the passage in which the comparison of the crown to a well with two buckets was made or the mirror speech, which needed to be smoother and more stately 'like an andante of Mozart' (Letter to John Gielgud, 15.10.1937). The essence of his objection was that Gielgud

did not surrender himself to the verse enough and was, instead, trying to achieve effects that were badly co-ordinated with the rhythmic structure. The actor's reply was that he wished to avoid declamation at all costs and preserve an appearance of naturalness within the conventional form. He was especially sensitive to the difficulty of reconciling the formality of the rhetoric with the authenticity of thought and feeling. So it is probably significant that the scene was lifted to the moment when Richard, gazing at his reflection, struggles with the conflict of artifice and sincerity within himself.

The request of Richard for a mirror entails in performance a pause during which the mirror is fetched. The direction in the standard text calls for the exit and return of an attendant functionary who remains anonymous. Gielgud made this person into the King's jester, a character who had already been given a vestigial identity through the earlier appearances he had made alongside Richard and his Queen. The jester had a bell on his coxcomb and bells on both his ankles and in the uncomfortable silence that ensued as he crossed the stage with the mirror, under the eyes of the impatient Lords, these bells must have jingled strangely. The Evening News (J.G.B., 7.9.1937) referred to the episode as an example of sensitive direction, but did not expand on its implications. The jester, in the first place, would be a natural member of the medieval court and, in this way, would add to the sense of historical background and serve to glance at Richard's frivolity and pursuit of vain amusements. The costume of Richard's jester assigns this official status to him. The mirror itself is a traditional emblem sometimes carried by the jester in place of a bauble. Lear, while he is arrogant and self-infatuated, is

followed by a fool. When he comes to accept his own folly and achieves a kind of enlightenment in madness the fool disappears. His reappearance in the deposition would therefore recall the King's former life style. The mirror episode in itself is open to numerous interpretations from that which regards it as a further example of the King's exhibitionist tendency, to that which construes it as a searching revelation of his innermost being. That it is possible to view it in either of these ways is shown by the equivocal retorts of the two men most intimately bound up in the demonstration. Bolingbroke's remark takes the objective, critical standpoint, setting forth the unflattering hypothesis that his rival's feelings are specious, though the actor may temper the implied censure with sympathy and understanding if he so chooses:

The shadow of your sorrow hath destroy'd
The shadow of your face. (IV.1.292)

Then again Richard, like Cleopatra, turns this evaluation on its head:

'Tis very true: my grief lies all within;
And these external manner of laments
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortur'd soul. (IV.1.295)

In other words, his grief is an entirely authentic, inner experience that can only be translated imperfectly into action. The complexity of the paradox of being for others and being for one's self is enhanced if it is remembered that 'shadow' is the term that has the further meaning of 'actor' for Shakespeare. Puck's use of it includes this sense in A Midsummer Night's Dream (Epilogue, 412). But in the always-moving, fully actualised circumstances of a theatrical representation it is hard to keep these multiple meanings before an audience. Gielgud's use of the jester to bring

the mirror, from this standpoint, seems like an excellent way of extending the verbal nuances into the stage pattern. For the jester's presence implies that Richard is both playacting and intensely serious. There is pathos in the servant's performance of this last office for his deposed master and at the same time an implied criticism that the request for a mirror is an opportunity for the King to play the fool. Richard vouches for the truth of this when he confesses in his dungeon soliloquy:

my time
Runs posting on in Bolingbroke's proud joy,
While I stand fooling here, his Jack of the clock. (V.5.58)

And he has already seen death as a fool or 'antic' throned within the King's crowned head, an image which derives much of its disturbing force from the fact that the grinning monster is actually the skull of the man beneath the skin (III.2.162). So the jester has a deep thematic relationship with the ruler.

The Times (7.9.1937) called Richard's speech after he has dashed the mirror to the ground the key to the actor's interpretation, noticing how Gielgud built steadily to this climax. From this moment onwards his playing resolved itself into a spiritual quest for identity which is never fulfilled in the play - unless one takes the lines he speaks at his death consigning his corpse to the earth and his soul to heaven as proof of the resolution of the quest. As he was being deposed, Gielgud won the pity of his audience not through denying Richard's selfpity, but by raising it through the grandeur of the verse to a higher degree. 'Sublime selfpity' underlined by scenic splendour impressed themselves on one observer (Teacher's World, 23.9.1937).

At the Old Vic Gielgud's command of the language spoken during his imprisonment had faltered and there were opaque passages in the long, tortuous reverie with which the scene opens that had blurred the concepts behind the figures and analogies. The miniature cosmology that is constructed by a hyper-active mind had in places seemed merely a matter of arid word play with no organic relation to thought. James Agate, amongst others, had noticed some lapses, yet now Agate made no qualification to his appreciation of the last act, which he called the peak of Gielgud's achievement to date (Sunday Times, 12.9.1937). In his final moments, Richard achieved an insight into his own being that transcended the artificiality of construction and prompted Herbert Farjeon to call it his best scene of all (Bystander, 22.9.1937). What this insight was Farjeon does not say, but it is reasonable to infer from the biblical allusions and the sympathy Richard shows for the poor and downtrodden that he achieved some religious enlightenment. There were spiritual gains to compensate for material losses even when Richard's weaknesses as a man, his morbid sensitivity, his masochistic reflective tendency, the crippling inertia of his guilt, remained (The Times, 7.9.1937). The soliloquy was taken slowly with a possible increase of speed at the reference to the Jack of the clock to communicate the speaker's change from meditative repose to agitation (V.5.60). With the entry of Exton and the murderers, the static picture was disturbed by frantic activity as Richard fought for his life. The fight was violent, but soon over. One of Granville-Barker's suggestions for improvement was that it should be emphasized more in order to bring out the contrast between the action's containment of conflict and the sudden struggle at the end, which is the only physical engagement in the play. Granville-Barker wanted it to be more brutal and clumsy so as to establish its sordid contrivance (Letter to John Gielgud, 15.10.1937). Richard has to seize a weapon and kill two opponents before

being killed himself and Gielgud's performance of this action was deft and efficient.

There was a broad consensus that Gielgud's Richard had improved in the seven years' space that followed on from his first appearance. Unlike his second Hamlet - which although popular was not generally thought to be as good as his first - there is definite evidence of maturation and increased technical skill that enriched his Richard. The Horse and Hound (10.9.1937) declared that the actor's rendering had deepened and broadened since he first played Richard at the Old Vic. There was no attempt to disguise the character's faults or his virtues. The creation that resulted was an intricate study of a man plagued by ill fortune who was arrogant and humble by turn. His weaknesses got the better of the good that was equally apparent in him. He was unlucky in his choice of friends and advisers, driven this way and that by the corrupt, divided court that he headed. In the tragedy of his failure he retained his charm and there was dignity in his demeanour even when his fortune was at its lowest ebb. The Times (7.9.1937) went on to supply some details of the nature of the improvement touched upon in this review, when it observed that Gielgud's playing was freer of mannerisms than it had ever been before. The actor was not only older and more experienced, the construction of the part had been simplified; the Old Vic performance was, in certain ways, needlessly elaborate. The growing disillusionment of the character with the material successes of this world had the ring of truth and the continuity of the phases of this process were welded together by initial intimations of splendour and late recollections of flaws in the man's personality. What emerges from both these reviews is a sense of the balanced integration of the impersonation, the cohesion of its parts and the logic of their articulation.

With regard to the scenery the production fared less well and it sustained some heavy attacks such as the one that was printed in The New Statesman and Nation (11.9.1937). Here the reviewer acknowledged the colourful and heraldic baronial modes of the costumes, but continued that there were too many distinct pieces of scenery that had no proper function. Glancing at Gielgud's O.U.D.S. production where a permanent set never hindered the movement of the play and contained it adequately, he deplored the retrogressive step that had been taken at the Queen's to return to the dilatory confusion of scenic Shakespeare 'as exemplified in the productions of Tree'. If Gielgud's picturesque stylization was not the exact equivalent to Tree's insertion of historical pageants between the scenes featuring himself, then it still cluttered up the stage with wood, fences and canvas-castles. The acting, on the other hand, used excellent teamwork to overcome the problems that the enclosure created. The success of Gielgud as the extravagant, headstrong, pathetic but sympathetic monarch was assured. Thus the writer exhibited the reaction of many of his contemporaries in defining the director's achievement as a trainer and co-ordinator of actors rather than as a deviser of brilliant tableaux. The on-the-whole-approving attitude to scenic invention illustrated by Granville-Barker and Derek Verschoyle was less common. Verschoyle argues that Richard II is especially suited to the combination of the roles of actor and director because the primary job is not, as in other works, to relate the central character to the play at large, but to relate the play to the central character. He expresses his doubts as to whether any director working objectively could hit the perfect balance that Gielgud had done working subjectively, though it might be objected that an independent director also would not approach the play in a spirit of detachment. The point remains an interesting one, recognizing the production's unusual unity of tone. With a nod towards Agate, Verschoyle conceded that one of the Motley sets was like the interior of a shop, yet he attached less importance

to this,acclaiming the representation for its sobriety and avoidance of freakishness and vulgarity. Simplicity, flexibility and freedom from rhetoric (to which Gielgud was supposedly inclined) were the parallel virtues of the actor's interpretation (Spectator, 10.9.1937).

The fine speaking of the cast, particularly the way voices were matched and synthesized,was a prime factor in determining the sustained impression. This quality was singled out by The Evening News (J.G.B., 7.9.1937) which saw the revival as heralding 'a new and first-class tradition in the speaking of Shakespearean blank verse'. Lines were enunciated with clarity and precision and due appreciation for their meaning,while beauty was implicit in everything that was said. The rich appealing utterance of Gielgud was used to the advantage of the King but it never sentimentalized his wretchedness or obscured the indulgence of his self-pitying orgies, and the supporting players preserved this distinction. In fact, the fluency of vocal style and the sad, falling cadences may have been too evenly distributed with some sacrifice of discrimination amongst the characters. Looking for an explanation that would account for an atmosphere of reserve that steeped the earlier scenes and went beyond the ineffable hauteur of Richard as he is first presented, The Morning Post (7.9.1937) speculated that it was due to the other actors taking their tone from their actor/director. Granville-Barker made exactly the same point, stressing the importance of the individualization of the characters through their speech. Of the supporting actors he said:

I thought that during the first half of the play
they were imitating each other; then I found they
were imitating you and your taste for sadder sforzandi
good enough for Richard and clearly indicated for
'Down - down I come - ' and 'No lord of thine, thou
haught insulting man - ' appropriate to him but quite

wrong for Augustus Caesar - Bolingbroke or
Mowbray or the 'Tenor' gallantry of Aumerle.
(Letter to Gielgud, 19.10.1937).

The strong personal instincts and practical knowledge of the actor in the speaking of verse could have distorted the director's contribution. This qualification has to be read beside F. Majdalany's no less true assertion that the smoothness and distinctness of the production gave the secondary roles their maximum opportunities. Praising Gielgud for his refusal to star himself, Majdalany ascribed his rare acting gift to his skill in projecting roles that are highly intellectual in concept without dispensing with emotional warmth. Allied to this was his combination of realism and poetic value in speech that never descended to declamation (Sunday Referee, 12.9.1937).

The topical appeal of Richard II had become widespread with Maurice Evans's contemporaneous success in America. The abdication of Edward VIII on the tenth of December in the previous year supplied a contemporary, if somewhat loose, analogy to the events in the play and fuelled the public interest. Reviews of the Shakespearean performance were prone to trade upon Gielgud's reputation as Richard of Bordeaux in describing his affinity to a mythic composite. Sometimes the hybrid that is created can be alarming, though its significance is unmistakable. Majdalany preluded his review with this commentary:

Gielgud has rescued Shakespeare from dusty shelves and has made him such live entertainment that smart audiences are moved to attend. Quantities of minks and sables and foxes were present at the Queen's. This Hamlet of Bordeaux - the tragedy of a king whose sense did not equal his sensibilities, a monarch in love with the illusion of kingship rather than its business we know already to be pure Gielgud.

Agate began his review in The Sunday Times (12.9.1937) with the observation that 'it was Richard of Bordeaux that put England's second Richard on the playgoing map of London, let us hope that Shakespeare's prentice play on the same theme will not wipe the monarch off the map.'

* * *

As much as Gielgud's Richard was indebted to the Benson tradition and the new wave of interest and reappraisal that had attended it, there was evidence of tension underlying his indebtedness. By the time he came to direct Paul Scofield in the part at the Lyric, Hammersmith in 1952 this tension had increased to the point where the inadequacy of the Montague conception was plainly felt. Agate was dead and Michael Redgrave (Gielgud's Bolingbroke at the Queen's) had already given an interpretation that was conceived in opposition to the prevailing orthodoxy (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1951). It was in this restless climate that Gielgud's production appeared.

In many ways the former Queen's production regulated the outcome of the later revival and one may trace such specific connections as the tripartite structure, occasioned by the introduction of two ten-minute intervals; the excision of the Aumerle conspiracy with the resultant gains in tonal integrity; and the elegant refinement of setting to this source. As regards the last particular, the stylish artificiality had been increased if the diffuseness had been remedied by a return to a permanent set. There was no place for realistic dummy trees and wicker fences in Loudon Sainthill's design. This went back for inspiration to the Wilton Diptych (which Gielgud's make-up as Richard had resembled) and to the Westminster Abbey portrait of the King as well as to missals and books of hours and the final effect was indeed very much like that of an illuminated manuscript. There was a border of wooden scaffolding that marked out two pavilions

that stood on opposite sides of the stage. The one on the left housed a flight of steps while the one to the right housed Bolingbroke's throne. The detail is interesting because it shows Gielgud not only at variance with Granville-Barker, who thought that the placing of Bolingbroke's throne should repeat the placing of Richard's at the opening (which Gielgud did place in the centre), but at variance with convention as well which would naturally be inclined to emphasize the importance of the king by placing his chair in the middle of the stage. Was this a way of casting doubt upon Henry IV's qualifications for office? Bolingbroke actually sat just forward from the pavilion with ball, sceptre and crown to assert his regality. The pavilions stood upon thin poles and were joined together by a castellated cross piece that, with the adjoining uprights provided a central frame. Behind this erection, a cloth of gold was hung which caught the light and threw it back onto the actors and the main playing area. The proscenium arch was of gold also and the stage was bordered by four elongated, gothic windows, two on each side, and a striped, scalloped awning like the decorative border of a tent at a tournament. This was the basic framework to which pieces could be added to meet the particular requirements of individual scenes, pieces such as a delicate, arched tracery to fill in the centre frame and the battlements and turrets of a castle. Curtains could also be pulled across to screen portions of the set in scenes that called for a more intimate treatment like Gaunt's colloquy with the Duchess of Gloucester and his death scene. The entire structure was patently unreal, lustrous, charming, fabulously contrived.

The costumes were similarly opulent and ornamented, with high, stiff collars, trailing slashed sleeves, cloaks and head scarves for the men and wimples and veils for the women all executed in delicate pastel shades.



4. Richard II and Queen, Lyric, Hammersmith, 1952.

For the military scenes plainer cloaks and chain mail were worn with gauntlets and round helmets with thick, circular brims. Richard too dressed in armour, wearing a chain mail balaclava, gauntlets and a dazzling surcoat emblazoned with lions and fleurs de lys. He appeared in state in a fleurs de lys crown, an ermine shoulder guard and an ankle length gown with brightly coloured, decorative bands that fell from a studded girdle. Paul Scofield made up with a small goatee beard (Plate 4). His Queen wore a veil over her crown. Bolingbroke dressed in darker colours, his beard and hair were black whereas Richard's were fair, but when he sat in state his appearance was no less opulent. Gilded tassels and stars spangled his coronation robes.

The play opened with Richard's glamorous ostentation and blasé temperament being underlined. Bushy, Bagot and Green were attractive, clean-shaven young men who lounged against the throne in elaborate clothes of lime green, pink and powder blue. Green had a lute and the King's boredom with the quarrel was suggested by his reading from a book that was held dutifully by Bushy. Granville-Barker with his tongue slightly in his cheek had imagined Richard playing cup and ball or reading the New Yorker or Froissart during the dull parts and Gielgud seems to have taken him at his word (Letter to John Gielgud, 15.10.1937). The throne was on a dais, at the centre, in front of an arched tracery and there were thin, carved uprights projecting from either side of the back rest. Bolingbroke's throne, on the other hand, was square backed with jagged castellation running along the top. When Richard was not reading from the book he sat looking ahead through half closed eyes that glinted beneath heavy lids. The favourites whispered advice in his ear. A note had been added to the programme to advertise the King's guilt, its careful wording creating suspicion without certainty. 'The Duke of Gloucester, uncle to King Richard

and brother to John of Gaunt, has been mysteriously murdered at Calais. The murder seems to have been carried out at King Richard's secret instigation by Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk'. Apart from the business that was incorporated to indicate collusion Scofield generated an aura of intimidating mystique that was similar to the austere composure Gielgud had adopted. His expressionless face had a mask-like inscrutability.

Throughout the play except during the final clumsy, ugly fight in the dungeon (The Spectator(2.1.1953) called it a 'shabby murder') his movements were decorous and restrained - a quality which was reflected in the statuesque poses and elegant deportment of the other players. The action was generally smooth and economical. Giving the signal with his warder to end the conflict of Bolingbroke and Mowbray before it had begun, he neither threw the baton down nor even let it drop from his hand, but simply lowered it. Previously the combatants had received their lances wrapped in beige cloth whereupon they left the stage to begin the joust. The opening of the lists was chanted formally by the King. One reviewer compared his delivery to the 'voice of a priest echoing round a cathedral' (Tatler, 14.1.1953). The episode of the gages at the start of the deposition scene was retained, but only one glove was actually thrown to the floor. In the abdication itself, which again made use of the throne to the side, angled obliquely to the auditorium on a dais so that Richard alone could occupy the centre of the stage while Bolingbroke looked on as a spectator, the mirror was broken gently instead of being flung across the platform. After he had been murdered, the cutting of the opening of the final scene permitted an immediate transition from the dungeon to the entry of Exton with Richard's body. Five identically dressed pallbearers carried him on ceremoniously, wrapped in a black shroud that allowed his face to be visible

and not in the coffin that the text specifies. The production ended with the tableau of Bolingbroke in his trappings of office standing above the body, its head turned inwards and the feet pointing diagonally into the auditorium, with Carlisle, Northumberland, Percy, Fitzwater and Exton kneeling in a semicircle around it. Carlisle held a jewelled crucifix on a pole aloft. The pallbearers stood with their arms folded, looking on from the steps while soldiers stood to attention in the background, their spears raised.

There were moments of spontaneity and unbridled feeling in Scofield's performance when, for instance, he kissed the ground on his return from Ireland and greeted his home land with full resonance of voice, or in the double-edged irony with which he accepted Northumberland's invitation to come down into the base court. These lines were uttered from a rampart, about seven feet in height, with castellated niches and towers containing elongated windows. The brickwork had been scrupulously painted in. The edifice was set and angled to the left so that Richard looked down obliquely at his enemies. As a representation of a real castle it was quite obviously out of scale and lacked all sense of depth. It derived its origin from the stylized fort that did service in 1937. The sort of criticisms that were levelled at it were correspondingly familiar. The Sphere (14.1.1953) was alluding to this, amongst other things, when it objected that the décor was too 'finicking' and resembled 'Toy town'. J. C. Trewin wrote:

I remember Paul Scofield's pause when, at the command 'Go some of you, convey him to the Tower', Richard, numbed, felt suddenly the humiliation of 'convey' and pounced upon it in the high scorn of 'O, good! convey! conveyors are you all! '... In two decades, from 1934 to 1955, it was excluded from any English revival, and we have missed it occasionally since. (Going to Shakespeare, p.87-88).

Yet these were isolated effects achieved within a reposed and graceful frame. Even the gardners and the Groom had refined mannerisms. The vocal style of the

company was precise and highly polished and the proscenium arch behind which they played created an impression of distance and remote otherworldliness that some found alienating.

Reactions to the production ranged from Ivor Brown's detached censure to The Birmingham Post's warm approval. Ivor Brown found the production too bland for his taste. Paying some acknowledgement to the neat, disciplined movement of the actors, he nevertheless thought that the picture-frame stage limited the intimacy of their monologues. Richard particularly was restricted by the pictorial method. There was too much deliberation and forethought in Scofield's interpretation, which was still carefully regulated with a scrupulous regard for fine phrasing. He felt all the time that the King was a remote and abstract figure. The actor's cerebral approach engaged the intellect but did not stir the feelings. The consequence was that there was no excitement about Richard's fall from power. At the beginning he was chilly and prim-looking whereas the text called for capricious debauchery. There was no 'rash, fierce blaze of riot' and no development to animate this fundamentally static portrait (Observer, 4.1.1953). Echoes of his views may be found in Philip Hope Wallace's commentary in The Manchester Guardian (31.12.1952) where Wallace complains that growth and the pursuit of a progressive line were missing from this vaguely intimated study of 'Proustian selfawareness'. Of the director's efforts, the reviewer had this to say :

Mr. Gielgud's direction may perhaps be trying for a certain formalism into which the play with its 'early' and archaic terms can fit more easily than it might into a naturalistic production: but the total effect is manner without richness. Likewise the decorations by Loudon Sainthill probably aimed at the simplicity of a missal illustration, but their effect is also cluttered and flimsy.

In complete contrast, The Birmingham Post (17.12.1952) was captivated by the pageant-like movement of the tragedy through 'filigree pavilions' and gilded hangings. The pavonine splendour of the costumes flashing against a setting that had the formality of a fourteenth-century missal was important in establishing the tone of Richard's court. Scofield appeared as a condescending autocrat who patronized his favourites and surveyed the universe 'with heavy-lidded hauteur'. There was a striking antithesis between his aloof autocracy and the attitudinising player that he was later to become. Pity was aroused, not through direct suffering, but by Richard's meticulous introspective examination of his own agonies. This kept up the emotional interplay well. There was a youthful zest in the performance that was admirably assimilated with the situation of the young, dejected King at odds with his melancholy world. He handled the poetry with assured composure and the lines overall were spoken with discretion and intelligence. Thus there was a considerable amount of dissent about the revival which was exacerbated by Gielgud's association with the Benson/Montague tradition and the disrepute that it was falling into.

It was Harold Hobson, writing as successor to Agate in The Sunday Times (4.1.1953), who saw the mould into which the director had cast the play as a demonstration of the inadequacy of Montague's thesis. Though Hobson concluded his appraisal with appreciation for the lyricism that 'pervades this production entirely', the beautiful, sensuous atmosphere and the rhythmic grace of a Richard whose 'strange, inscrutable gaze is illuminated by the golden light of the settings', he was quite plainly in revolt against a concept that he took the production to embody. Gielgud's enterprise exhibited superb verse speaking, audibility, music, rhythm and (here again we recall the Queen's production) a scrupulous care for the

smaller parts. The result of all this was that it was not the King alone who was an artist, but also those who surrounded him.

Montague perceived the aesthetic attitude towards experience in Richard, but overlooked that all the others are the same. This is not because Shakespeare intended all his characters to be poets but because he himself was drunk on lyricism.

It is interesting to compare Hobson's position with that of the reviewer in The Times (30.12.1952) whose argument was that the Scofield characterization, fascinating and memorable elsewhere when the actor was pursuing his instincts, flagged during the scene at Flint Castle, becoming stiff and false, because of his dutiful nod towards the Montague orthodoxy. Having observed the accepted tradition, he then returned to life in the deposition scene, giving a moving performance.

In the following year Gielgud took his production to Rhodesia, stepping himself into the title role. He staged what might be called an open rehearsal, without sets or costumes, in this country before travelling abroad with the company. The Times (20.7.1953) reviewer saw his interpretation as conforming in pattern to Montague's formula. The incapable and unfaithful King was reconciled to the capable and faithful artist. As far as it was possible to judge from a rehearsal, this Richard was putting on an act for his court. His voice rose high in arrogance and the lines were sensually caressed. The performance was classically austere and full of elevated poetic feeling. It was pitched consistently on the level of serene despair.

The main feature to emerge from a survey of Gielgud's work on Richard II relates to the formal style of the verse. All the productions we have looked at have tried to come to terms with the formalised structure and style of the play by including an element of formalism in

their methods of presentation. Harcourt Williams's production, in keeping with the policy at the Old Vic, was lightly formalised, making use of hand-held pennants, conventionalised castle walls and heraldic symbols borne on shields. Gielgud's productions at the Queen's in 1937 and with Paul Scofield (1953) were both heavily formalised. Motley's designs were rich, diffuse, decorative and blatantly contrived. Loudon Sainthill's designs were based upon a book of hours, just as artificial as Motley's, but grounding the action in a permanent set with a single, symbolic hue: gold, the colour of royal splendour and cold cash. Both productions made use of a stylized castle, looking back to the flimsy fortifications in use at the Old Vic. The O.U.D.S. production that Gielgud directed alongside Glen Byam Shaw, before his two professional productions, was, in some ways, the most strictly formalised of all. The characters moved against a Gothic triptych surrounded by courtiers, soldiers and citizens wearing masks. They comported themselves 'as if they were a chorus emphasising the meaning of the play' (E.A. Baughan, News Chronicle, 18.2.1936). Gielgud's approach to the play in general, then, was highly sensitive to its formalities and generally sought to make them more obtrusive in production.

But this approach could easily be overdone and the visual appeal of sets and costumes in 1937 and 1953 was in danger of interfering with the language by competing for attention, instead of enhancing it - especially as their stylized qualities gave them a strange, unreal and dream-like presence. The stronger the appeal to the eye, the greater the chance of distracting the ear. In the case of the 1937 production, Motley's scenery did clutter up the stage at times and reduce the impact of some scenes though it did not break up the flow of the action unduly. The play's unity of tone is, perhaps, best preserved by some kind of permanent setting.

The 1937 and 1953 productions also demonstrated the other risk inherent in a formalised approach, that the play's credibility is damaged. Shakespeare is partly at fault here in composing strained and exaggerated episodes that require some disguise in representation - I am thinking of the gages scene and some of King Henry's later speeches (IV.3.59, V.6.11, V.6.17) - and Gielgud has always shown himself ready to use the blue pencil. Another aspect of the problem is that Richard II is a play set in a distinctive and exact historical period which arouses definite expectations in the mind of the audience. Gielgud, and later Scofield, implicitly acknowledged the influence of authentic historical detail in basing his make-up on the Wilton diptych, and most actors playing Richard have tried to look, more or less, like the historical King. But the sense of reality of the period is not compatible with complete formalism and the director has to be careful in striking a balance. Critics displayed hostility, on each occasion, to the artificial battlements that Gielgud (1937) and Scofield (1953) stood upon in III.3. to lour down at the rebel army. Where Gielgud had more success as a director was in his ability to communicate audibly the verse integrity of Richard II in the uniform vocal style of his actors and the full weight he gave to the smaller parts and short scenes such as that of the Welsh Captain. Here he built upon and supplemented the work begun in the Old Vic production by Harcourt Williams where the company's speaking was less assured overall. Despite the diffuseness of Motley's décor in 1937, the play produced a more unified impression than the Old Vic revival. In fact, Gielgud's methods may have given Richard II more of a concentrated impact than it actually possesses. Granville-Barker in 1937 and later Ivor Brown and Philip Hope Wallace in 1952 found the insistent and undeviating lyricism slightly too polished, too smoothly pervasive: Gielgudean rather than Shakespearean.

The essential quality of Gielgud's own acting interpretation of Richard is not to be distilled in a beautiful voice and a graceful presence, as misconceived criticism often has it. True, Gielgud did display these qualities at a very early stage in his career and they helped him to establish an immediate rapport with the role so that he could say, in all honesty, that Richard was the easiest of all the parts he played in his Old Vic seasons. But it is the main contention of this study that Gielgud's achievements, as with all great acting, were basically founded upon technique and not upon personal mannerisms. The actor, in developing his art over a lifetime, is constantly eroding the boundaries of his received identity. The essential quality of Gielgud's performance was the way in which he made the vocal arias and stylized actions present the divided soul of the King. Richard is a flawed and vulnerable human being who is related, through his office, to an ideal symbol of royalty and Gielgud's technique was broad enough to communicate the mortal inadequacy of the man and the sublime grandeur of the monarch. His acting ranged along the spectrum from formalism to naturalism.

In spite of Gielgud's early assurance in the role at the Old Vic - it was really his first major Shakespearean performance - it was not until 1937, that his playing reached a level of maturity which has, I would say, never been surpassed by any actor's interpretation since. Yet the Montague tradition has been so powerful in the theatre that the acceptance of Gielgud's Richard has always been qualified by the legend of Benson's, probably unfairly so. Ironically, in 1953, when Gielgud came to direct Paul Scofield and the legend showed signs of fading, Gielgud's influence as a director was equated with the decadent Montague tradition, though he had always, in his own performances, held it at arm's length.

1. Except where otherwise indicated, information on the productions discussed in this chapter is principally based on the following sources:

OLD VIC, 1929

Harcourt Williams, Four Years at the Old Vic
 John Gielgud, An Actor and His Time
 Eric Philips, The Listener (14.2.1957)
 John Gielgud interview, R. C., The Era (28.5.1930)
 James Agate, 'Half a King', Sunday Times (24.11.1929)
The Linguaphone Shakespeare Series: Selected
 Extracts from Shakespeare spoken by John Gielgud.

QUEEN'S 1937

John Gielgud interview, Theatre World (August 1937)
 Motley interview, Richard Clowes, Sunday Times (5.9.1937)
 John Gielgud, 'King Richard The Second', Stage Directions
 John Gielgud, A letter to the writer (7.6.1980)
 Harley Granville-Barker's letters to John Gielgud in Harley
 Granville-Barker: Man of the Theatre,
 Dramatist and Scholar.
 Harry Andrews interviewed by the writer, Cassette, (5.3.1980)
Richard II with John Gielgud, Caedmon, recording

LYRIC, 1952

Souvenir Programme
 J. C. Trewin, Going to Shakespeare

2. See for instance Walter Pater, 'Shakespeare's English Kings', Appreciations (London, 1899) and Richard D. Altick, 'Symphonic Imagery in Richard II', Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America, 62 (1974). Both these essays are contained in Richard II : A Casebook, edited by Nicholas Brooke.
3. A. C. Sprague's Shakespeare's Histories : Plays for the Stage contains an account of the play's fortunes on the stage covering these productions.
4. Though some of you with Pilate, wash your hands,
 Showing an outward pity - yet you Pilates
 Have here delivr'd me to my sour cross. (IV.1.239)

5. For the pose, see Hynes's caricature in Punch reproduced in Hallam Fordham's John Gielgud : An Actor's Biography in Pictures.
6. The first complete play Gielgud directed was Romeo and Juliet for the Oxford University Dramatic Society in 1932. Despite the presence of Peggy Ashcroft (Juliet) and Edith Evans (the Nurse) amongst the cast the O.U.D.S. was essentially an amateur organization.
7. The relevant extracts from these letters are reprinted in C.B. Purdom's biography, Harley Granville-Barker : Man of the Theatre, Dramatist and Scholar . Gielgud's correspondence with Granville-Barker over this production began in the Spring of 1937 before the opening of the Queen's season. Granville-Barker met him once to give advice prior to the production and after seeing it wrote two more letters of criticism. These letters contain many useful references to points of acting and stage business. Recognizing the difficulty for the actor in communicating Richard's complicity with his favourites in Gloucester's murder, Gielgud favours the solution of a programme note to support any stage business that is adopted.
8. Richard II with John Gielgud, Caedmon, SRS 216, Richard II with Richard Pasco, Argo, ZPR 14628.

CHAPTER THREE

HAMLET

The tone of Hamlet takes its colour from the hero's mind. It is probing, tentative and speculative. It displays a deep distrust of the pat answer and an overall reluctance to dogmatize. The story itself is open-ended, beginning with the appearance of a ghost that stimulates conjecture about a supernatural order of being beyond the knowledge of man, and it ends with the stage strewn with corpses and a dying pronouncement which is a surrender to the inexpressible:

O, I die, Horatio!
 The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit.
 I cannot live to hear the news from England,
 But I do prophesy th'election lights
 On Fortinbras; he has my dying voice.
 So tell him, with th'occurrences more and less
 Which have solicited - the rest is silence. (V.2.350)

There is a tension between Hamlet's desire to ensure the continuity of temporal government and his silence about the unknown region upon whose threshold he stands. His practical concern with the election and the accurate reporting of events may point to the emergence of a conscientious statesman, whose personal preoccupation with death is deflected by public considerations, but it cannot disguise the irony of language's inadequacy to comprehend the extinction of the individual man, who has castigated himself for unpacking his heart with words like a whore, even when his final remark is balanced against Horatio's lyrical epitaph. The order of society is circumscribed by a mysterious and ineffable quiet which is emblematic of the world of the play at large. Once again the inchoate,

finite nature of human reality is affirmed. This sense of vast obscurity stretching beyond man's control and sceptically questioning his experiences is also realized within the mind of the Prince. Hamlet is called upon to act in a peremptory and singleminded fashion, but his consciousness seems to defy the restriction that is placed upon it. Instead of behaving in accordance with the primitive revenge impulse as it is epitomized in the archetypal figure of Pyrrhus, he adopts a series of guises that express different aspects of his fluid personality without exhausting its potential. The basic, ontological insecurity that he shares with his world is conveyed theatrically in a series of vivid scenes that reveal the madman, the rejected lover, the Machiavellian schemer and the stoic philosopher. The constant movement and variety that are maintained through these personae provide the actor with considerable opportunities to display his virtuosity and, at the same time, permit an unusually wide degree of individual interpretation. These active variations make Hamlet the most frequently performed of Shakespeare's plays. Production styles in the present century have tended to reflect both the essential ambiguity of design and the two hundred years of inherited playing traditions that have collected around a popular and regularly mounted work.

To take Gielgud's involvement with the play alone, we see that he has been associated with seven distinct revivals, four of which he has directed himself. He has appeared in the leading role on six separate occasions each time under radically different conditions of staging. Making his début at the Old Vic, in 1930, in a deliberately simplified production that employed a minimum of props and scenery, he went on to play the part in the more elaborate context of a West End production in 1934 that made use of a revolving platform and many changes of level. Two

years later, in 1936, he took his performance to American audiences, appearing in a lavishly costumed and scenically orientated production at the Empire Theatre, New York. In 1939, a further venture led to a performance being given at Elsinore, on a thrust stage, under the open sky, in the courtyard of the palace, with the Renaissance architectural facade of the building for a background. The rich hangings and sombre lighting of the 1945 production at the Haymarket created a contrasted atmosphere to the light and spaciousness of the Elsinore revival. The tour of the Far East which Gielgud undertook in the following year, the last time ever he was to perform Hamlet, resulted in presentations being given under all sorts of peculiar and makeshift circumstances. On one occasion the play was performed on an erected scaffolding in the midst of a semi-circular auditorium - a performance in the round. Gielgud's final production took place in 1964 when he directed Richard Burton as Hamlet in a modern, 'rehearsal' clothes presentation, divested of the customary scenic and period trappings. This long and varied connection with the play points, not only to the central place it has occupied in his own career, but also to the versatility of Shakespeare's text. No doubt whilst experiments demonstrate a concern to explore the possibilities contained in a poetic drama full of dark meanings and universal suggestions, they also indicate the burden of inherited playing traditions stretching back to the Restoration. There is a real danger that Hamlet, in the theatre, will be overwhelmed by the ossifying familiarity of actors and audiences with earlier revivals that cramp originality and stifle any freshness of response.

Harcourt Williams was aware of this threat when he devised the sparse and economical method of production that would launch Gielgud in the role.¹ His chief aim was to provide a simple, neo-Elizabethan production, uncut,

and undiluted by the clutter and elaborate detail of the nineteenth century. There were three fronts on which he mounted his attack. He rejected the archaeological accuracy which established the action of Hamlet in a remote epoch and updated the story to the time of its writing. The Elizabethan period was chosen as the one most suitable to express the Christian and civilized, if decadent, atmosphere of the court together with the protagonist's princely and cultured bearing. Thus the women wore long dresses and farthingales and the men ruffs and padded breeches. The King, played by Donald Wolfit, was dressed ostentatiously in a short cloak and striped doublet and breeches, with ribbon garters and buckled shoes. He had a pointed Caroline beard and moustache which contributed to the impression of suave and sophisticated villainy. An evocative resemblance was suggested between Gertrude and Ophelia through the low necklines and the high butterfly collars of the actresses. In the mad scenes Ophelia wore mourning black. Hamlet was attired simply in a black doublet with a lighter decorative border and puffed epaulettes, gathered in at the waist by a belt that supported his sword and dagger. The white cuffs and floppy collar of his shirt were visible beneath the doublet and a suggestion of disordered attire for his assumed derangement was achieved merely by loosening the collar fastenings and allowing them to dangle. After the return from his sea voyage, the change in Hamlet's disposition was marked by the wearing of a new violet and grey doublet with a dark border stripe otherwise similar in style to the one worn in the earlier scenes. He retained his sable garb up until his departure for England. The second important innovation that Harcourt Williams introduced was the use of a full text which was later alternated with a cut version. The full version ran for approximately four hours, with one half hour interval after the play scene, and proved to be a chief facet of public interest. With heavy cutting still the fashion in many theatres - often entailing

the removal of Claudius's prayer scene soliloquy and Fortinbras - it was then still possible to be surprised by the increased clarity and integrity of a complete performance. The reviewer for The Era (G.W.B., 30.4.1930) was not alone in appreciating the lucidity of playing and, in particular the greater depth of secondary characters like the King and Queen. From Gielgud's point of view, Hamlet was more clearly related to his surroundings and stood out in definition to the character foils that surrounded him. Moreover, the actor playing Hamlet has the advantage of being able to study the part in rehearsal in the light of the natural breathing spaces and rhythmic pacing that Shakespeare has provided. Whether the full text is finally performed or not, he is in a better position to appreciate the progressive line of the role. The cut version that Harcourt Williams used was inclined to reduce the smaller parts rather than effect Hamlet's speeches directly and was still light by the standards of the age. It removed only one half hour from the complete running time.

The third departure from tradition that was made was in the casting of a twenty six year old actor as Shakespeare's Dane. Hitherto, the fashion had been for much older actors to take the part and they had continued to play the character until long after they were physically suited to it. Irving did not attempt to play Hamlet until he was thirty six and Benson continued to play the 'Sweet Prince' until well into his seventies. Some discrepancy exists in the text as to Hamlet's precise age, but if the accent is placed on his youth then the poignancy of certain passages such as Ophelia's lamentation is enhanced.

O, what a noble mind is here o'er thrown!
 The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;
 Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state,
 The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
 Th'observed of all observers - quite, quite down! (III.1.150)

A young Hamlet will also increase the filial conflict between parents and children which is dramatized in the contrary inclinations of Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia, as it is indeed in Hamlet's own attitude towards the Ghost. Thanks to the influence of writers like Noel Coward the idea of a rebellious and giddy younger generation had taken hold in the theatre. There were certain vague similarities which made the hysteria that Hamlet displays after confronting the apparition of his father and in his behaviour towards Ophelia and his mother immediately intelligible to the theatre-going public of the time. Gielgud understudied Noel Coward in The Vortex and it is hard to read the concluding scene of that play, in which mother and son bitterly recriminate each other, without being struck by the agreement of the general situation with that of Shakespeare's closet scene. It is easy to forget this now when we are used to seeing young Hamlets on the stage, but Gielgud's was the forerunner of the modern tradition. The Daily Herald (29.4.1930) typified the reaction of many contemporary reviewers when it declared:

The factor that did most to restore the balance of the play ... was that ... we had a young actor, one who could look, behave and even feel as might an undergraduate of the University of Wittenberg. So many difficulties vanish when Hamlet is young.

After Gielgud's interpretation it was hard for audiences to react to older performers in quite the same way. In fact, so much is made of Hamlet's youth that reviewers sometimes neglect to observe the youthfulness of other members of the company, an equally important factor in shaping a response. Horatio was Hamlet's contemporary and the Queen was interpreted as a young and attractive woman, in her thirties, by Martita Hunt. A picture shows her and Hamlet in the closet scene in striking juxtaposition (Plate 5).



5. Hamlet and Queen, Old Vic, 1930

The basic set comprised a main platform, with two steps leading down to the apron stage, which could be cut off by means of curtains for front scenes while minor rearrangements of furniture went on behind. As Harcourt Williams tells us, this was a false stage that had been erected several feet above the real one to allow for a grave trap in the centre. Ophelia could be lowered into it from above and the gravedigger could converse with Hamlet from inside the grave, standing on the genuine stage below, although Hamlet and Laertes were not required to leap into it for their fight. Behind the false stage was an upper rostrum providing an additional playing level reached by two flights of four steps on either side. This too had a curtain that could be drawn across to obscure the narrow, rectangular window in the facing wall, intimating the interior of a castle, and later the two stylized trees that created the impression of an open exterior in the graveyard scene. Photographs in The Morning Post (30.4.1930) from which this account is drawn to supplement the description provided by Harcourt Williams, disclose a bare, though functional, lay out (Four Years at the Old Vic, p.154).

After the Ghost's appearance on the battlements, a black velvet curtain parted to reveal the palace. Courtiers were milling around conversing with one another and the Queen sat upon the upper level doing her embroidery, attended by ladies. The King entered, dressed to go hunting, and began to address the court while Hamlet remained aloof nearby. It was a deliberately informal arrangement which the director had chosen to avoid 'the throne - struck unreality' that usually attends upon the opening court scene, but he may have gone too far towards minimizing the public tenor of the meeting. The scene is, after all, formal in tone and has all the orotund ceremony of an official gathering. Claudius is delivering an open

proclamation of his marriage in terms of government policy, Gertrude is 'Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state' (1.2.9) and Hamlet's alienation is all the more striking if a convened administrative session is taking place. Polonius's presence - he was wearing in this production a ruff and long goatee beard - indicates as much.

The episode that introduces Laertes and Ophelia to the audience was played as a front scene before the curtain, allowing a direct transition to the ramparts for the Ghost's third entry. The apparition was only dimly lit, thus focussing attention upon the reaction of Hamlet who fell to his knees on catching sight of it and spoke the 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!' (1.4.39) speech from that position. When the Ghost waved Hamlet away to a more removed ground, the lights sunk and the curtain came down separating Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo from the royal pair. It was a makeshift provision to create a change of location that neither Gielgud nor Harcourt Williams were entirely content with for it broke up the action and acted as a signal for applause where continuity was desirable. However, the curtains were soon opened again for the re-entrance of father and son. The difficulty of managing a sword and tablets at the same time led to Gielgud's metaphorical construing of the lines 'My tables - meet it is I set it down/ That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain:' (1.5.107). The tablets were in Hamlet's mind and to clarify this Gielgud banged his head on the line 'So, uncle, there you are' (1.5.220).

The advice to the players and the 'rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy were two of the moments highlighted by The Stage (4.5.1930) although a criticism was made in The Era (7.5.1930) that Gielgud gave the Pyrrhus

recitation too seriously. The postponement of the single interval until after the nunnery scene brought this soliloquy close to 'To be or not to be' and it thus served as an emotional peak in a performance that began quietly. The following meditation on suicide then came as a form of psychological recoil, with Hamlet having descended from passionate rage to a gloomy despondency that denoted his erratic temperament. The words were pronounced very quietly and accompanied by pauses to give the feeling of conscious rumination. The Observer critic declared that he had never heard it better spoken, noticing particularly how care was taken to preserve the contextual values of all the soliloquies (H.H., 14.5.1930). Gielgud was highly sensitive to the audience's familiarity with the speech and wished to avoid giving any undue prominence to it. His own remarks show how he related the soliloquies directly to the action on the stage.

Several times a week one is distracted by the knowledge that the audience are repeating one's lines after one, frequently one can hear words and phrases being whispered by people in the front rows, just before one is going to speak them - indeed, Leica cameras and the quoting of famous passages aloud are two of my worst phobias in a performance of Hamlet. This particular speech in itself is such a perfect thing that if you have executed it correctly you are apt to feel complete and satisfied at the end of it, but not ready to go straight into the rest of the scene. Like so many other great speeches in this play - it has to be studied, spoken, re-studied, and respoken, until one can combine in it a perfect and complete form of poetry and spontaneous thought and yet at the same time use it only as a part of the action. The character and the value of the speech lie in the fact that it leads on to the next part of the scene just as it must grow out of the previous action ('The Hamlet Tradition', John Gielgud's Hamlet, pp.146-147.)

In the event, he may have underplayed and striven too hard for a naturalistic effect. Several reviews complain of inaudibility during the soliloquies (The Evening Standard, 29.4.1930; R.E.L., The Yorkshire Post, undated, Birmingham Reference Library). The Era (7.5.1930) acknowledged Gielgud's ability to communicate a thought process, but ended with the reservation, 'when he has played more, he will be able to get his effects without pausing quite so many times. He broke up the verse a little too much'.

Ophelia and Hamlet were seated for most of their ensuing exchange - a feature of the staging that was approved of by The Sunday Referee's reviewer (1.6.1930) who found that the scene was played with an under-current of affectionate feeling suddenly disrupted. No preceding business was devised to indicate Hamlet's awareness that he was being spied upon prior to the interview and this gave Gielgud the opportunity to play the earlier section of the dialogue with tenderness rather than brutality. The Sunday Times (11.5.1950) observed that 'Get thee to a nunnery' was at first spoken with pathos. The realization that he was being secretly watched came upon Hamlet quite naturally, without any movement to indicate that the King and Polonius had betrayed their hiding place. The suspicious question: 'Where's your father?' (III.1.130) that served as the turning point, denoted a deduction that the speaker had come to on his own initiative. Yet, in the absence of any action to confirm the supposition, this was not made clear to everybody and, one reviewer failed to notice any break at all (Era, 7.5.1930).

For the play scene, Harcourt Williams placed the King and Queen on thrones in the centre of the upper stage with 'The Murder of Gonzago'

being performed below, in front of them upon the apron, which must have meant that the players had their backs to the audience. Such a formation would tend to divert attention from the play onto the beholders and there was plenty of byplay to ensure that the onstage audience would engage interest. Claudius was displayed drinking heavily, a point that was used to account for his failure to respond to the Dumbshow, and Hamlet was kept constantly active. As the recreation of the murder reached its climax, Gielgud crossed behind his chair and was able from here to direct the exultant 'What frightened with false fire!' (III.2.260) straight into the King's ear. Claudius seems to have been completely disarmed, for he flew 'from the nightmare crying like a child for light' (Four Years at The Old Vic, p.162). The Sunday Times (11.5.1930) testified to the speed and the energy which enthused this part of the action and the genuine excitement of the house on Gielgud's climactic utterance (III.2.260). Even then, one is inclined to be uneasy about blocking that was so one-sided in its distribution of emphasis between players and spectators. No doubt if a choice has to be made between courtly onlookers and 'The Murder of Gonzago' itself, then the former are the more important, but what is really required is a stage arrangement that favours both parties equally. Gielgud was to achieve a better balance in his own production four years later. At least one member of the audience recorded his distraction at the business allocated to the watchers of the play to make them obtrusive. The Sunday Referee (1.6.1930) found Claudius's habit of going up into a corner to swallow drinks disconcerting. The interval curtain came down after Hamlet's diatribe against Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which Gielgud concluded by forcing them to accept the recorder.

The prayer and closet scenes were related by a wedge-shaped division down the centre of the stage that allowed the two episodes to be played on alternate sides, without any adjustment of the picture other than alterations of the lighting. Hamlet simply passed from one side of the platform to the other to gain access to his mother's chamber. The introduction of a bed into the Queen's closet was an unusual enough feature to arouse comment. The Stage called it 'a novel touch on the producer's part' (4.5.1930) and Gielgud was to adopt it himself in subsequent productions. It is, perhaps, a measure of the influence of his Hamlet upon our conception of the play that, as J.C. Trewin and A.C. Sprague have observed, a bed is a regular feature of modern performances (Shakespeare's Plays Today). There seems to have been no special significance attached to its appearance here in spite of what later directors were to make of it. Harcourt Williams neglects to mention the bed in his account of the play and it had a practical function to serve as a place for the body of Polonius to fall. Nevertheless, with the younger playing of Hamlet and Gertrude and the relocation of the confrontation in a more suggestively intimate environment a Freudian ambiance begins vaguely to emerge. Hamlet's accusation:

You cannot call it love; for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, its humble,
And waits upon the judgement (III.4.67)

is bound to sound unreasonable when it is addressed to a woman who is still sexually in her prime. In any case, both Martita Hunt and Gielgud performed this scene with such vehement passion that it became a key moment, extending the upward curve of the excitement after the untenting of the King's guilt.

The Times (29.4.1930) remarked upon the lucidity with which this difficult scene was managed whereas The Evening News (29.4.1930) referred to its 'terrific poignancy'. One of the issues that was set out clearly was the Queen's innocence as far as the murder of her husband was concerned. When Hamlet reproached her with the deed it was manifest to him and to the audience in her reply that she had not been an accomplice.

Hamlet A bloody deed! - almost as bad, good mother,
 As kill a king and marry with his brother.
 Queen As kill a king!
 Hamlet Ay, lady, it was my word. (III.4.28)

W. A. Darlington recognized the habitual 'thick-witted good nature' of the Queen 'which exonerated her from all suspicion of complicity with Claudius' (Daily Telegraph, 29.5.1930). James Agate thought that Gielgud lacked the pathos and the demonism of Henry Irving and needed to look and sound uglier in the attack upon his mother, but added that within the range of his peculiar talents he could not have improved upon his playing of Hamlet (Sunday Times, 11.5.1930). The Ghost was not seen when he made his strategic intervention and so the audience shared the Queen's apprehension of the incorporeal air.

From here on the momentum was maintained with Hamlet's final soliloquy which was slower paced and more composed. After the interlude of Ophelia's madness, which achieved its effect without the use of any flowers, Hamlet returned to the stage for the graveyard scene and the scuffle with Laertes which, according to Agate, failed to come off successfully, possibly because of the actor's fatigue. On one occasion the mislaying of the skull led to the omission of Hamlet's famous eulogy. The incident was reported in The Daily Chronicle (30.5.1930) under the felicitous headline: 'Hamlet, but Alas! No Yorick'. The fencing match was a rapier and dagger contest that

was fought under an open sky on the battlements of the castle. The King and Queen looked down upon the contestants from above. A table with the foils upon it was beside the King and, after Hamlet had been allowed the first choice of weapon, Claudius put the poisoned sword into Laertes's hand.

Critical estimation of Gielgud's performance rated highly the qualities of restraint and consistency of characterization. Possibilities for the broader histrionic effects that the part contains were subordinated to simplicity and naturalness and a coherent line of action. The novelty of this Hamlet did not reside in the projection of any new and radical interpretation, but was rather rooted in his youthfulness, his eloquence and sensibility which enabled him to chart the ebb and flow of variegated feeling. Always the mercurial actor, Gielgud combined responsiveness to emotional nuances with keen intellect to communicate the breadth and profundity of an intricate personality. By modern standards he was still perhaps grounded within the romantic tradition of Hamlets, relying heavily upon pathos, nervous energy and neurotic sensitivity, aspects of his impersonation that would be enhanced by his willowy build and refined good looks, yet there was no indulgent sentimentality in his portrayal nor did he try to hide the darker side of the character. In this he would have been helped by the restoration of passages such as the lines over the body of Polonius that are incompatible with the strict romantic view of the Prince and which were therefore usually cut. The Manchester Guardian wrote that

Mr. Gielgud's Hamlet is young and is never fixed in handsomeness, it has beauty when the text proclaims it, and the ugly mockery of disillusion when that is needed. It is angry, violent, and tender as the sense demands, and with what loving care does Mr. Gielgud know and guard the sense, (I.B., 29.5.1930)

And this is a view that is corroborated by Gielgud's own testimony in an interview with Martin Jenkins:

when I got down to the actual performance I suddenly thought, I think I've got to be myself more than anything else. And I suddenly thought well I'm sure there are lots of very bad things about me and my private qualities that are bad which I have always been terrified to show on the stage because I thought it was unsympathetic, unattractive, unromantic and that audiences would hate me and I sort of realized, I think because of the length and complication of the part of Hamlet that for the first time I really had the courage to show as many bad qualities of my own personality as good ones.

There were a few voices raised against the less mature interpretation, such as that of the writer in The Yorkshire Observer (29.5.1930) who, in spite of his enjoyment of the production, argued that an older actor could have presented a richer character. The Morning Post (29.5.1930) detected a little roughness of voice and uncertainty of emphasis indicative of a not altogether complete technical command of the role. On the whole, however, reviewers were slow in mentioning shortcomings and occasionally descended from the critical podium to indulge in pure panegyric. Thus one account referred to the ecstasy to which Gielgud surrendered as 'the touchstone of art' finding him to be identified with his part at almost every instant (Era, 4.6.1930). A more objective assessment appeared in The Observer (14.5.1930) which picked up the general points about the moderation, the articulateness and the evenness of development that have already been made here. The critic began by saying that Hamlet, as he is played by Gielgud, defies any obvious label and is instead distinguished by general traits. Amongst them we find 'a refreshing sense of continuity', the revelation of 'the many-sided nature of the Prince' and 'the spirit allied to sincerity which is youth's sublime prerogative'.

The success of this production, which was transferred to the West End for an extended run, encouraged a further attempt four years later with Gielgud, this time, having graduated to the level of director as well as the principal within the acting ensemble. This 1934 production at the New Theatre was more sophisticatedly mounted than the Old Vic production and was designed to reach a wider audience, although it was in some ways indebted to its predecessor. The open air setting of the duel scene and the bipartite division of the stage in order to accommodate the prayer and closet scenes without a break in the action were derived from the provisions Harcourt Williams made. In other ways it displayed original thinking, such as in the placing of the interval after III.I. There was an advantage in running 'The Murder of Gonzago' and Hamlet's verbal assault on Gertrude together, since these two critical moments, combined with the prayer scene, comprise one mounting crescendo with only the short, comparatively relaxed conference of the King and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to keep them apart. The stronger the element of continuity in this great central core of the drama the more coherent it will appear. There is also the gain of preserving something of the sense of Hamlet's journey from the summons of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to his arrival in the Queen's chamber which contributes to the irony of his meeting with Claudius. Having shown his anxiety over giving way to an inclination to murder his mother, he is suddenly presented with an opportunity to murder his step-father and finds that he is prevented from taking it. The resulting juxtaposition then has the additional attraction for Gielgud of favouring his theory that the closet scene is the real climax to the play's central movement:

The following scene and the killing of Polonius is to me, as an actor, the climax of Hamlet's long inaction. The whole of the subsequent tragedy springs from this later movement. Besides, it is this physical act that seems to

break the spell of doubt in Hamlet's mind and unloose his stream of repressed anguish and revenge ... It is a terrific strain to open this scene at the pitch at which the text demands, but it is essential to carry the mood of the play scene through the four or five scenes that follow it and maintain the feeling of a consecutive time-lapse. ('The Hamlet Tradition', John Gielgud's Hamlet, pp.56-157.)

On the other hand, Polonius's comments, which wind up the earlier scene, are directly anticipatory and imply no significant time lapse either.

The action was divided up into fourteen scenes and lasted in all three hours. Cuts included Hamlet's 'mole of nature' speech before the second entry of the Ghost (1.3.23) and the beginning of V.2, in which he recounts to Horatio the circumstances leading up to the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Cornelius, the second ambassador to Norway, was removed and so was Hamlet's callous line over the body of Polonius, 'I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room' (IV.4.212), but this may have been part of an accidental omission occasioned by memory lapse. Because he already knew the play, Gielgud rehearsed without a promptbook and repeatedly omitted,

Indeed, this counsellor
Is now most still, most secret, and most grave,
Who was in life a foolish prating knave. (IV.4.215)

until he discovered his error some four weeks into the run. A large and controversial cut that was made intentionally was the excision of IV.3, where the King despatches his nephew to England, which was inclined to weaken the mordant, ironic side of Hamlet's character as well as play down the importance of the antic disposition. It may be an exaggeration to say, with James Agate, that half of Hamlet is here (Sunday Times, 18.11.1934), but the unattractive, devilish aspect of the hero's psychology is certainly well represented by such remarks as,

Your worm is your only emperor for diet, we fat
 all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves
 for maggots, your fat king and your lean beggar is
 but variable service - two dishes, but to one table.
 (IV.4.22)

To accommodate the plan to use a range of steps and rostrums making possible simultaneous action on several distinct levels with rapid continuity, a circular, rotating platform was designed. This supported all the major scenic accessories that could be moved into place simply by turning the stage slightly. With the draping of curtains and the imaginative grouping of extras, Gielgud was then able to present a series of diversified settings in stylized but opulent surroundings. What he was aiming at was a blend of period atmosphere that distilled the essential splendour and sophistication of a sixteenth century court and an underlying mood of harsh implacability, symbolized by the cold and darkness and martial panoply. Stars twinkled over the battlements of Elsinore and the costumes of the players were touched with phosphorus to make them glow in the dark. Metallic hues of silver, bronze and gold set off the reds, the blues and the royal purple. Hamlet wore a cloak of white fur in the graveyard scene and the soldiers who were present in all the principal scenes, even when the text did not call for them, mingled with the brilliant court in their black and grey costumes, carrying steel pikes. The Birmingham Post (15.11.1934) was duly impressed by the integration of tones:

This new Hamlet has a visual beauty of its own. It is vaguely Elizabethan, vaguely Gothic, rich in colour and sweeping in line. The background is a black sky, with flights of stone steps, then a room hung with heavy brocades of black and gold. Between these exteriors and interiors the action alternates: beneath 'the silken dalliance of the wardrobe' there is always the flash of dark armour. In the shadows the halberds and breastplates of the Switzers gleam momentarily to remind us that it is the tragedy of a martial age. (R.C.R., 15.11.1934)

The prominence of Claudius's bodyguard may also have reinforced the difficult and perilous nature of Hamlet's mission. Gielgud this time wore the same basic mourning costume throughout the play, consisting of puffed sleeves gathered in at the wrist, an open white collar and a necklace chain. When it came to feigning madness he loosened a garter, disarranged his hair and pulled down his collar (Plate 6). The Ghost was alone in being dressed in the armour of an earlier epoch. To the reviewer of The Sketch (28.11.1934) he looked like 'a saxon warrior of the fifth century' when he made his portentous appearance upon the battlements - a figure from the remote past in another age of different values. He responded to the crowing of the cock, represented by a sound effect, long since ignored in performance.

The tableau for the first court scene was loosely based on a design by Gordon Craig for the Moscow Art Theatre production of 1911. The King and Queen were seated on a stepped dais upon two thrones to the right and obliquely angled to the auditorium. The key position that Polonius held at court was signalled by his standing on Claudius's right with a staff of office in his hand. The courtiers stood to the left in a semi-circle, glancing up at their sovereign. Behind them, in front of a perpendicular curtain, screening off the far corner of the stage, sat Hamlet, cut off from the crowd. (It was Craig's elevation of the King and his visual identification with the court, opposed to the Prince's isolation, that Gielgud had found so inspiring.) At the back a rostrum, with steps leading down to the main playing area, supported soldiers on its successive treads, standing to attention with their pikes raised vertically. On the other side, behind the thrones of the King and Queen, another curtain hung down and billowed outwards. The curtains were decorated with a heraldic motif of scutcheons, depicting the three crowns of Sweden and

Denmark. It was an arrangement that captured the air of formal ceremony in addition to bringing out the alienation of Hamlet. The angling of the dais and the concentration of attention there permitted a dramatic shift of focus when Laertes came forward to press his suit, suddenly revealing the bowed form of the Prince, in profile, seated at the furthest extremity from the throne. His presence was noticed by the King and the two enemies communicated across the width of the platform, their dispositional antipathy indicated by the space that separated them. James Agate's description shows him to have had reservations about this self-effacing presentation of the hero:

The soldiers have stopped marvelling, and the curtain has risen on the first Court scene. Their Majesties are already seated in a setting of such rich, if sombre, magnificence that the house breaks into applause. The King has made his opening speech and is asking Laertes what he wants and we have still not made up our minds which among the courtiers is Hamlet! Or would not be able to do so if we were strangers to the London theatre and did not know Mr. Gielgud. Can it be that they are going to play Hamlet without the Prince? No; for at last we spot him as much withdrawn as the width of the stage permits. Is he a trifle too spectacularly in the shade, a thought too determined to be the unobserved of all observers? Is there too petulant a charm in the sweep of the chin and throat, like Byron sitting for his portrait?

There may be. (Sunday Times, 18.11.1934)

The problem here is that the King has a long and involved speech before Hamlet's first line and it is important that he should not have to compete for attention with anybody else. Gielgud's decision to keep the Prince in the background was contrived to allow for this, but a policy of self-effacement contains its own risks as Agate's comment indicates. Hamlet needs to stand out without distracting attention from Claudius's oratory. Nonetheless, by treating the scene as a grand state occasion, Gielgud was demonstrating his independent thinking, taking it beyond the

more casual interpretation of Harcourt Williams to underline the contrast of the bustling, public assembly and the meditative, private grief of the first soliloquy. When he spoke this speech it was the idealization of his dead father that was brought out most strongly. The Sunday Pictorial (18.11.1934) had never seen this affection, which in Gielgud's reading amounted to worship, made more emphatic. The ensuing exchange with Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo was coloured by the fond smile of Hamlet on hearing that his father's beard was silvered.

For the actual encounter with the Ghost, Gielgud stood on the darkened stage with his companions, a cloak drawn around his shoulders. As the Ghost made its entry, shrouded in shadow, he stood with his back to it, first becoming aware of the manifestation through the amazed expression on Horatio's face. Turning to confront the apparition, he collapsed into his friends' arms in a movement that resembled a swoon, before finally sinking to his knees to address the spirit, reverentially, in a voice hushed by awe. Moments later, he was galvanized into action when Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo tried to prevent him from obeying the supernatural summons. In the subsequent struggle, Hamlet left them holding his cloak while he went on to pursue the object of his speculation. Despite the director's attempt to create an impression of insubstantiality by picking out only the upper half of the Ghost's body in a faint beam of light as it began to speak, this section of the play was not fully realized. Most probably it was the failure to direct the minimal lighting with sufficient intensity and accuracy that made the flesh and blood Hamlet appear as nebulous as his spiritual namesake. To Alan Bott it seemed as if all the voices were coming from wraiths after the Ghost had revealed himself ('Entertainments a la Carte', Tatler, 5.12.1934). The lights were extinguished altogether during the sequence of falconer's cries that brings Horatio once more to Hamlet's side when Gielgud stood on a staircase,

and in the dark, James Agate thought that he did not have enough strength of voice to make the words telling. 'Come, bird, come.' (1.5.116) was inaudible to the ear of anybody unfamiliar with the line (Sunday Times, 18.11.1934). The audience laughed at the expostulations of the Ghost spoken from the cellarage. Still Gielgud was able to make 'O my prophetic soul! / My uncle!' (1.5.40) stand out, delivering it as a blood curdling shout of confirmation (Edinburgh Evening Despatch, 23.4.1935). The scene was concluded with a piece of business that was first used by H.B. Irving, but which surely also owes something to Granville-Barker, providing a further instance of Gielgud's close reading of him. Granville-Barker tells his reader to

note finally that Shakespeare does not end the scene upon this resonant rhymed couplet {The time is out of joint. O cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right (1.5.89)}, but with a repeated quiet,

Nay come let's go together.

- upon a Hamlet exhausted in need almost of physical aid, in need of friendship; and this burden promises but to make him a lonelier man than ever (Prefaces, p.64)

This critical point was transformed into stage practice when, seeing Hamlet shivering with cold, Horatio threw his own cloak around the Prince's shoulders. Gielgud had taken care to lose his cloak in his departure with the Ghost. Then, on the shortened line that Granville-Barker had quoted, he brought the cloak round to encompass Horatio as well so that the two men went off together sharing the single cloak. It may be objected that Granville-Barker's commentary alludes to a Hamlet in need of comfort and who is not necessarily to receive it, but the business undeniably points the last line, which is otherwise easily overshadowed.

Gielgud displayed once more an awareness of contemporary scholarship in incorporating the advice of Dover Wilson that Hamlet should overhear the King and Polonius discussing the idea of using Ophelia as a decoy. This occasioned an earlier entry than the one that is called for in the standard text to take in Polonius's speech;

At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him
 Be you and I behind an arras then;
 Mark the encounter: if he love her not,
 And be not from his reason fall'n thereon,
 Let me be no assistant for a state,
 But keep a farm and carters. (II.2.161).

But the point escaped notice in reviews and remained difficult to communicate in the theatre. Perhaps it explains the extra edge which was given to the remarks directed towards Polonius when Hamlet feigns madness. These were unusually pointed and ironic, delivered with little emphasis upon the lunatic disguise that cloaks their real significance. There was no risk of Gielgud's Hamlet seeming really unbalanced, for he continued to generate an aura of intellectual perspicacity all the while he was indulging in pretence. Raymond Mortimer was surprised by the absence of any eccentricities that would suggest a simulated condition of mental instability (New Statesman and Nation, 24.11.1934) and James Agate wondered why Hamlet's cheek was not detected by Polonius, particularly as this role was interpreted by George Howe as that of a brisk and acute elder statesman, comically garrulous though not senile nor a buffoon (Sunday Times, 18.11.1934). When applied to him, Hamlet's satirical description of old men with weak hams, rheumy eyes and a plentiful lack of wit was wildly inappropriate.

The inspiration for the play came to the Prince while listening to the player's speech, probably on 'the unnerved father falls' (II.2.468), where, as Gielgud has written, the allusion to Priam as a father must jolt Hamlet

out of his forgetfulness ('The Hamlet Tradition', John Gielgud's Hamlet, p.143). At this moment, or thereabouts, he gave an involuntary start that indicated his mind had begun working again. The 'rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy was a passionate aria, once more bringing to a climax the thwarted instincts that had been building up inside the hero since the Ghost had placed its obligation upon him. At the crucial juncture where his mounting rage is given vent in his cry for vengeance, Gielgud stamped upon Claudius's empty throne in a furious impotent gesture that brought the speech to a crescendo. 'To be or not to be' was then rendered with slow and thoughtful musicality. Avoiding any hint of a formal recitation, he moved about the stage as he spoke, pausing after key phrases with more artistry than he had done in 1930, so that his momentary hesitations were not intrusive and seemed instead to 'present not merely the sequence of his thoughts, but in addition the process of his philosophizing' (Glasgow Herald, 16.4.1935). The nunnery dialogue with Ophelia was modified by the advanced warning Hamlet had of the plot to spy upon him. On the line, 'Where is your father?' (III.1.130) his attitude showed that he had exposed her guilt, with accompanying incidental business to demonstrate that he had detected the eavesdroppers. The precocious modernity of Jessica Tandy's Ophelia must have lent credibility to Hamlet's notion that her naivety was a pose that she had adopted to mask her conscious betrayal of his trust (III.1.42). Her short, curly hair, dress of low neckline and attractively made up face together with a certain pertness of manner, indicated an independence of will delicately poised against her obedience. In her mad scene, wearing mourning, she approached the attending soldiers who crossed themselves in fear and spoke her last 'God buy you' (IV.5.196) wantonly to one of these guards. It was an interpretation whose novelty appealed to some (Daily Mirror, B.B., 15.11.1934) and was rejected by others. The Scotsman (23.4.1935), acknowledging Jessica Tandy's break with tradition, had considerable reservations about the new reading. In obeying her father

she showed a mental reserve instead of the customary, sweet dutifulness and was reputedly not alarmed by Hamlet's disavowal of love. The speech of lament for her lover's departed reason that she gives at the end of the scene was apparently irreconcilable with the actress's playing of the role. The absence of real flowers from the mad scene was again thought to detract from the pathos (Scotsman, 23.4.1935).. Yet Ophelias may be reluctant to obey Polonius and display some resistance to Hamlet's recriminations and still be compatible with the text. One wonders how these reviewers would react to the Ophelia of the original Toby Robertson production of Hamlet at the Old Vic in 1977, where the actress performed a masturbatory mime. (This business was later toned down considerably.)

The play scene constituted a distinct improvement upon Harcourt Williams's production in that it recognized the fact that the action of 'The Murder of Gonzago' and the on-stage beholders are equally important. The King sat high upon a stepped rostrum, with his bodyguard standing behind him, on one side of the stage while the play went on on the other. Gielgud had supplied a smaller stepped rostrum with a throne where the player King slept, thus creating a mirror effect whereby Claudius on his rostrum looked down at the imaginary counterpart on his. The main body of the courtiers sat below with the Queen, grouped around her chair. Ladies-in-waiting sat on the floor in front and Ophelia, on a stool in front of them, just left of the centre. This arrangement gave both the King and Ophelia a special prominence, but prevented Claudius from relating to the Queen in any significant way since she was on a completely different level to him. The massing of the courtiers at the edge of the stage and adjacent to the wings, together with the angling of the Player King's rostrum, gave the impression of a continuance of the spectators beyond the footlights, as it were, in a semi-circle, with the resultant effect that the real audience were looking at the play-within-a-play askance. The

player's rostrum, which was the focal point of their stage, faced diagonally off, slightly to the left. Yet the disadvantage here was that Claudius also had a marginally oblique view of 'The Murder of Gonzago' from his eminence. Of course, had the play-within-a-play been brought around entirely to favour his perspective, the real audience would have had a less comprehensive view of it. So Gielgud's solution was a compromise between antagonistic factors. It was not entirely satisfactory. Raymond Mortimer observed that the play scene was 'muffed' though he went on to soften this judgement by adding that he had never seen it staged effectively (New Statesman and Nation, 24.11.1934). Claudius's call for lights that signals his guilt, to this reviewer, sounded incongruous perhaps because in order to say it he was required to descend the flight of steps before his throne and blunder onto the middle of the stage under full light. But The Morning Post (15.11.1934) had a different criticism to make:

Just at times one felt that a flat stage has its merits. In the Play Scene, for instance, the King seemed too far up and the masked players too far down to get the complete effect of both together, but it gives Hamlet a magnificent rush for the final outburst. The value of the unswerving march of the drama was incalculable.

This 'magnificent rush' must have occurred after Lucianus's speech when Gielgud moved from beside Ophelia's stool to the corner where the play was being performed, seizing the mask of the Player King and pointing it accusingly at Claudius. After the swift but relaxed conversation with the players and Horatio and the intense conviction with which the praise of the man who is not passion's slave was spoken, Hamlet's sudden outburst came, no doubt, as a striking counterthrust, in spite of The Edinburgh Evening Dispatch's opinion that the play scene would have been improved without gymnastics (23.4.1935). With the King's fearful retreat, the stage was cleared rapidly, leaving Hamlet and Horatio, who were soon joined by

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The action of breaking the recorder that Hamlet invites Guildenstern to play, considered during the rehearsals for the Old Vic revival and rejected, was restored in Gielgud's production at the Queen's, showing again his indebtedness to Irving. The business itself is less enlightening about the import of the scene than it is about the persistent strength of tradition at that time, even in a production that was generally acknowledged to be innovative and modern. The action was applauded by audiences as one would relish participation in a time-honoured ritual.

A diptych effect for the prayer and closet scenes was secured by the hanging of curtains dividing the stage into two equal compartments alternately lighted. Gielgud was able to adapt Harcourt Williams's idea to the service of his own production by draping the curtains in such a way that they not only acted as a divide, but also suggested the curtains of a bed. Winifred Holby noticed the sense of height and spaciousness established (Schoolmistress, 6.12.1934). The fluid, thematic linking of Hamlet's encounter with his stepfather and then his mother in similarly secluded environments was mentioned in The Leeds Mercury (30.4.1935), where the two episodes were said to be picked out with a single beam of light. So Claudius now prayed before the bed he had defiled and Hamlet's resolve to postpone killing him until he is in 'th'incestuous pleasure of his bed' (III.3.90) or about some other unhallowed practice became an imminent prospect since he stood in the King's bedchamber when he said it. Just as the candle Hamlet had carried in 1930 heightened the sense of darkness, so flickering shadows clustered thickly about the bedchamber in this revival. The King was seen divesting

himself of robe and crown prior to going to bed, but fearfully retaining his sword. He baulked at the shadows that surrounded him, indicating his suspicions of an unseen assailant. Then, satisfied that he was alone, he placed the sword on a nearby chair and knelt to pray. Emerging from behind, Hamlet drew himself up sharply on finding his enemy off his guard. The Scotsman (23.4.1953) recorded the distinctive character of the movement. Hamlet carried no sword at his side, for Gielgud had not wanted to be encumbered by one, so he picked up the sword that Claudius had laid upon the chair, going on to his mother's closet with it. As an appendix, the King abandoned his fruitless attempt to pray, speaking the couplet that confesses the inadequacy of his effort and, turning to retrieve his sword, discovered it gone. He departed in even greater terror. The business was often cited as an instance of the vivid detail contained in the production. (See The Evening News (J.G.B., 15.11.1934) for instance.)

Crossing the divide that separated the King's and Queen's chambers, Hamlet went on immediately to the meeting with his mother. Like Jessica Tandy as Ophelia, Laura Cowie played Gertrude with fire and vitality. She was a vigorous woman of middle years, glamorous and sensual. Her long, billowing, off-the-shoulder dress, necklace, jewels, and dark, coiffured hair accented her attractiveness and it is easy to see why reviewers noticed something of the exotic femme fatale in the actress's performance. She played up to the vehemence of her son's attack in the closet scene, refusing to be intimidated, at the same time making clear her innocence when his entry with drawn sword gave her good reason to fear for her life. The Yorkshire Post (30.4.1935) commented on her display of spirit that made her a worthy mother to the strength of Hamlet. Neither his reproaches nor his threats of disaster could bully her. The Glasgow Herald (16.4.1935) mentioned her insensitivity to Hamlet's opening

accusations and how they illustrated that she did not know what he was driving at. It was ignorance and shallowness which was manifested in her behaviour rather than any deep-rooted evil and the brutality of the onslaught she was exposed to awoke sympathy for her. The conflict of two such personalities generated the kind of fervid tension that Gielgud, as director, was looking for to lift this scene above the excitement of the preceding ones and avoid all danger of anti-climax. The body of Polonius was screened by curtains which were closed by Hamlet after he had discovered the identity of the corpse, and the pictures of the two monarchs that he referred to were imaginary. Everything was done to focus attention on the internal struggle of the two combatants in the private, eerily darkened room.

The entrance of Fortinbras followed hard upon the closet scene, owing to the cuts that had been introduced, with little rearrangement of décor. The change of locality, even with an interval to absorb the shock, was too much for George Warrington who declared that the 'Norwegian prince seemed to be in danger of entering Gertrude's bedchamber' (Country Life, 24.11.1936). Hamlet spoke the 'rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy with crystalline, analytical precision to the dull sound of a beaten drum as the army marched by. The drum was silenced in the later performances because it was found to be distracting. He struck a soldierly attitude that provided evidence of his hardening resolve. Ophelia was buried on an upper platform, at night, surrounded by crucifix tombstones and the lanterns of mourners. There were steps leading down to and below the grave. The white cloak in which the Prince appeared may have symbolized his greater spiritual calm after the sea fight. In any case, it enabled Gielgud to achieve one striking effect when, after hurling the line 'the cat will mew, and dog will have his day' (V.1.286) contemptuously into the face of the

King, he pulled the cloak about him and slunk off in silence. The furious outburst against Laertes was delicately shaded into the assumption of mock-lunatic gravity. The gap between the churchyard and the final duel scene was bridged by the interlude with young Osric – ably played by Alec Guinness. The Glasgow Evening Citizen (16.4.1935) said he was 'outstanding among the small parts'.

Laertes and Hamlet fought with rapier and dagger on a raised scaffold watched by the King and Queen, who sat on opposite sides of the stage, in profile, on thrones: the King to the left, the Queen to the right. A table, on which was placed two stoups of wine, one of them the poisoned cup, stood down centre and a stairway descended behind, on the Queen's side of the stage to a higher inset, from there to the main duelling scaffold. A sky cyclorama stretched behind, dominating the vertical plane, with emblazoned curtains hung on either side, to give a feeling of amplitude and elevation. By having the King and Queen die upright in their chairs and Hamlet collapse at the centre, Gielgud was able to build up an impressive tableau of the dead dynasty and its transfer of power to Fortinbras. The Norwegian Prince, clad in full armour and a cloak, entered via the steps attended by soldiers and took up a place in the centre behind Hamlet cradled in the arms of Horatio. The soldiers were ranged along the staircase with drooping pennants juxtaposed with the vertical pikes of the palace guard looking on from the other side, whose job it was to hold back the crowd of dismayed onlookers. The grouping was predominantly symmetrical and tectonic, with the trailing pennants creating an interesting variation, tilting the emphasis towards the centre of the picture. But, in spite of its pictorial beauty, the tableau was criticised both for its lack of organization and its use of different levels. The Yorkshire Evening Post (30.4.1935) was inclined to fault Gielgud's direction, generally, for his persistent

reliance upon steps to create varieties of pattern. The habit of characters entering in view of the audience to mount flights of stairs at the rear and then having to descend again to get to the front of the stage was apt to be tedious. Staircases of various kinds were currently enjoying widespread use in the English theatre after the new interest shown in them on the continent. Gielgud would be impressed by Komisarjer-sky's King Lear (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1936) which had a wide block of steps facing front on and steps were also featured in Leopold Jessner's Richard III (Staatliches Schauspielhaus, Berlin, 1920) and in Barrymore's Hamlet (Sam H. Harris Theatre, New York, 1922). Audiences soon became over-exposed to what was increasingly regarded as a director's fad. The reviewer of The Scotsman (23.4.1935) thought that the complexities of staging entailed by the last scene were allowed to get out of hand. Other reviewers, however, responded to the bold and emblematic quality of the play's finale. One asserted that 'the final scene, with the players thronged beneath a wide sky, is an allegory in itself' - (Yorkshire Post, 30.4.1935). The slow dropping of the flags to signify the beginning of the soldier's funeral was a feature that attracted notice, in particular that of Audrey Williamson (Theatre of Two Decades, p.42, Star, 15.11.1934).

The interpretation of Hamlet which emerged from this second revival continued to be distinguished by its clarity, intellectual consistency, articulateness and youthful vitality, allied to a technical command of language. There was a naturalness and freshness about Gielgud's approach that not only removed some of the layers of tradition that were interfering with a proper response to the play as a stage vehicle, making it swifter and less elaborate without sacrificing its elegance, but there was also a relevance and modernity with which he invested the character that identified his plight with the contemporary social malaise. Hamlet's

tragedy was described as the tragedy of disillusion and this was associated with the disillusion of twentieth-century, post-war youth. The resemblance seems to have been more accidental than literal and it should not be exaggerated to obscure the self-conscious borrowings that were made from earlier performances, particularly from Irving, who exerted a considerable influence over Gielgud's way of conceiving the role, even though he was too young to have seen him perform. Still it was the critical scrutiny of ideals and the sense of betrayal that struck the contemporary note. The connection was made explicit by a review that appeared in The Eastern Daily Press (16.11.1934):

It is interesting to see how the production reflected what we know of the generation - one that by nature of the times in which we live shrinks from overtones and sure assertions and thinks in puzzled vein of its days that know no repose. It is a generation that somehow feels hurt. One saw that in Mr. Gielgud's Hamlet.

And the point was reiterated in The Glasgow Herald (16.4.1935) which stressed the spontaneity of expression that was employed throughout to bring the play up to date. For W. R. Darlington all the essential ingredients of Hamlet were held in an equally balanced portrait: youth, a romantic presence, brains, a beautiful voice, an ability to speak verse and a 'melancholy and philosophic quality' with the power to suggest 'a man of action'; the actor wanted only to avoid becoming too quiet now and again to be utterly convincing (Daily Telegraph, 16.11.1934). There was a definite process of maturation at work, Darlington argued, since the ground work of 1930 had been laid. Yet his opinion was by no means shared by everybody and many influential critics sensed a want of feeling in the role, as it was now being presented, that arose out of the young actor's determination to eliminate all exaggeration of emphasis and theatrical mannerisms. In his concern for brisk, facile and

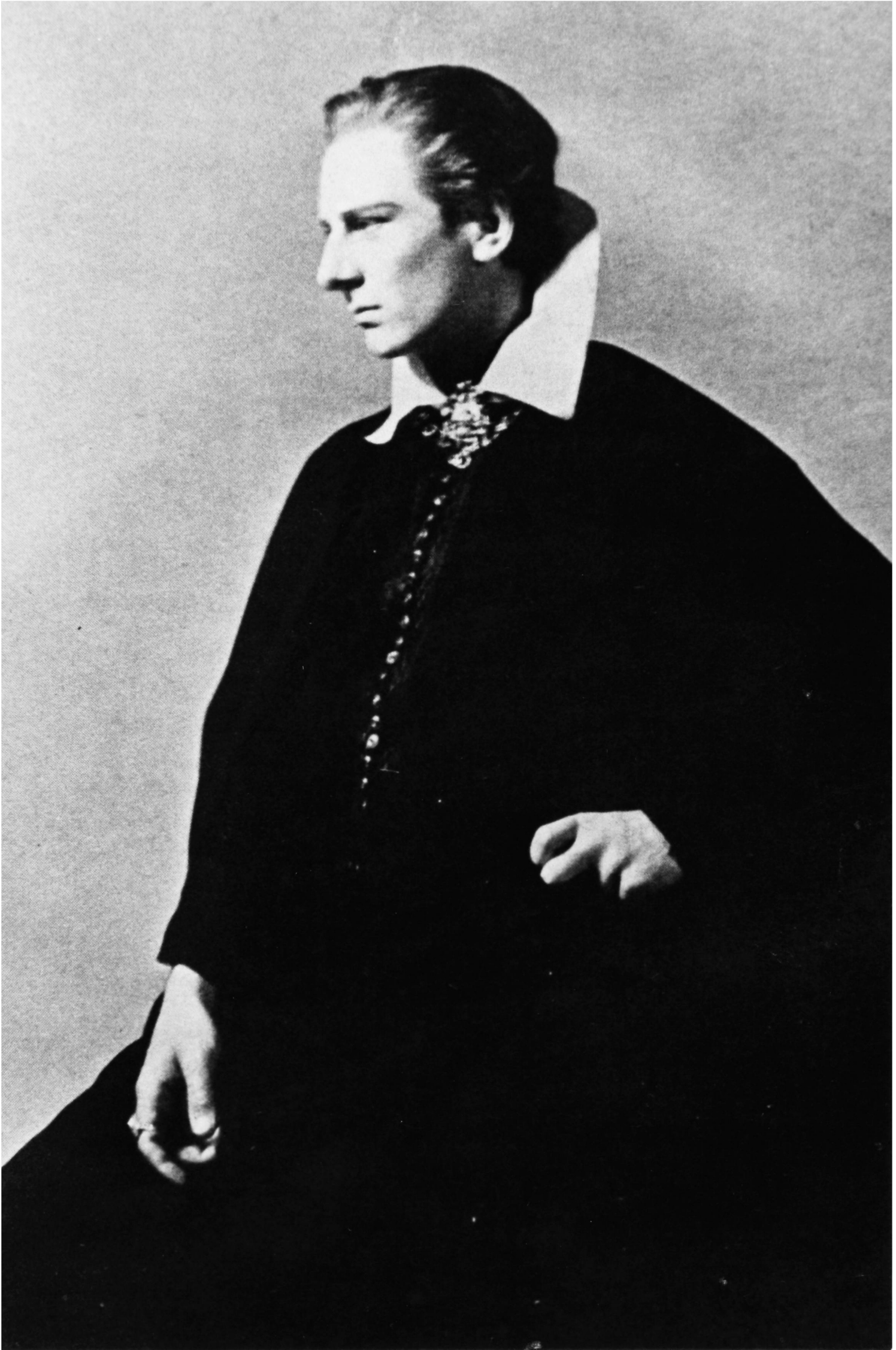
melodious speech and the contextual value of the poetry, it was suggested by James Agate, amongst others, that Gielgud was guilty of underplaying. The poetic side of the character was there, but not the warm familiarity that would ensure the reciprocity of emotion between Hamlet and his audience in the playhouse. Agate, of course, was an appreciator of Irving and a staunch supporter of the older acting style and it was precisely Gielgud's refusal to adopt an orthodox approach that he criticised. Overall the reaction of the reviewers was more mixed than it had been in 1930 although the popularity of the production with the playgoing public was confirmed by box office receipts of £33,511 and one shilling.

* * *

The next time Gielgud's Hamlet was seen was on the stage of the Empire Theatre, New York, under the direction of Guthrie McClintic. Having directed and acted in his own production, he had come to realize that in many ways the two jobs were extremely difficult to combine. For, whilst it was an advantage to be a member of the acting team engaged in the presentation, thereby understanding the actor's problems from first hand experience and being always there to execute changes and correct the weaknesses that creep into a production before they have had time to spread, the jobs imply different perspectives which are hard to reconcile. One of the major objections that had been levelled against his second Hamlet was that he was sunk too deeply in the world he inhabited and this impression of self-effacement was perhaps derived from his division of responsibilities. He confessed to The Star (15.11.1934) that he had spent less attention on his own part than he would have liked owing to his preoccupations as a director. There was, then, something to be said for concentrating the acting experience acquired from two long runs of the play in a further performance under the supervision of an independent director. Moreover, it had been demonstrated that the speed, the simplicity

and the neo-Elizabethan approach which Gielgud had learnt from Harcourt Williams could be united with opulent décor and a pictorial grace and style that would make them acceptable to a wider audience. The symbolic and decorative use of curtains, the blocks and steps of the permanent set mounted upon a revolving platform, the atmospheric lighting, had enhanced the play's fluidity and spare strength and its economical power of suggestion. A fresh eye, bringing with it a new outlook would possibly discover different potentialities.

The basic change that McClintic made was to set the play in much heavier and richer surroundings. One has only to look at the tall, brooding battlements, the ornate gold canopy and grey and orange drapes of the Queen's bed and the winding flights of steps ascending to two symmetrical turrets depicted in Jo Mielziner's set designs to appreciate the lavish means that were provided. Mielziner's graveyard scene, for example, (in contrast to the simple rostrum of Motley's design for the 1934 production, which elevated the graveyard scene above the main stage, its three crosses providing the only suggestion of masonry) shows a church tower on one side of the stage balanced by a castle turret on the other. An arch abutting the church gives access to a flight of steps. A walled sepulchre stands down centre and above and behind is a stone eminence with stairways at either end from which vantage point Hamlet and Horatio may look into the grave. The latter supplies more information about the locale and lacks the unrealistic touch of the grave being above floor level. It possesses a feeling of solidity and depth altogether absent in the lightly formalised Motley arrangement.



7. Hamlet, Empire/Saint James's, New York, 1936

The intention to supply a sumptuous, spectacular dimension was also manifested in the choice of costumes which were more elaborate and bejewelled than the eye-catching though simple and economical cut that was worn previously. The decision to place the action in the Caroline period naturally tended to reinforce the idea of decadent ostentation. Thus the Queen's face was heavily made up with an obtrusive mole below her lip. Her hair was curled across her forehead and she wore a necklace and lace. Hamlet's collar was wider and is raised around the neck. He had a brooch at his throat, in addition to a chain and the front of his tunic was decorated with sequin buttons while his sword had an ornamental hilt. His legs were covered by black knee-breeches and stockings held in place by ribbon garters with rosettes upon them. Clearly the Danish Court was much given to display and this is stated even in the protagonist's dissenting mourning garb (Plate 7).

Two primary sources for the following discussion are the promptbook, which contains a record of the spoken text and numbered act and scene divisions, with some rudimentary lighting cues (but not, unfortunately, the accompanying moves and business) and an extended scene-by-scene commentary on the production written by Rosamond Gilder and published a year after the New York debut.³ Gilder adopts a narrative format and focusses essentially on Gielgud's performance. She does not however, attempt to analyze what he did in relation to the text of the play, since this would be to obscure the book's fundamental documentary purpose. Thus Rosamund Gilder's invaluable groundwork provides the foundation for a broader examination.

Whilst the part of Hamlet incurs some cuts, the textual arrangement of the promptbook seems purposed to preserve in as broad outline as possible the shape of the role. The blue pencil is used most

frequently to remove cruxes, passages of involved elaboration around a central idea and long-since-dated topical allusions. Hamlet does not refer to the famous ape climbing into the basket (III.4.194) or quote the epitaph of the hobby horse (III.2.129). He does not indulge in the complicated word play involving the confusion of the functions of the sensory faculties.

What devil was't
That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight;
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope. (III.4.76)

Neither does he mention the 'dram of eale' generally thought to require some editorial emendation, which leads to the removal of the whole 'vicious mole of nature' speech (1.3.23). Elsewhere, care is taken to retain the Prince's lines where others are removed - for example in V.2, where the beginning of the scene dealing with the discovery of the plot upon Hamlet's life and the counter-measures he takes is cut, but the thematically important references to the service of indiscretion counselling faith in a providence that shapes man's destiny is retained. Horatio and Hamlet then move straight on to their conversation about conscience (V.2.56), having lost almost all the preliminary matter leading up to it. Lines are even appropriated for Hamlet that are not his and we find Gielgud being given the Ghost's 'O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!' (1.5.80) just as it had been spoken by Garrick. Here the interruption is inclined to disguise the silence with which Hamlet greets the news of his mother's corruption. Up until the moment that the Ghost mentions Gertrude he has been given repeated exclamations to denote his horror. This part of the Ghost's tale mirrors his own most

painful obsessions and overlaps with the content of the first soliloquy. Other minor cuts include some of the remarks Hamlet makes in welcoming the players, a portion of his reflections on death in the graveyard and a few of the quips made about Osric.

The lines of the rest of the characters were judged to be more expendable. Reynaldo is removed altogether and thus the parallel between Polonius spying upon his son and Claudius's spying upon his stepson is obliterated. Any questions about the King's response to the Dumb Show are forestalled by its removal. 'The Murder of Gonzago' is also curtailed, the Player King losing his resonant lines upon the contrary courses of fate and human will (III.2.195-208). The First Player is also deprived of his account of Pyrrhus's hesitation in killing Priam that coincides with Hamlet's delay, pointing out a resemblance. Even though it is the player and not Pyrrhus to whom he compares himself, Gielgud was convinced that the content of the speech did stimulate Hamlet into appreciating the resemblance. Yet it was not the hesitation of Pyrrhus that first brought the coincidence home to his Hamlet, but the phrase 'th'unnerved father falls' (II.2.143). The continuation was cut in the New York production. Evidently Hamlet was struck by the connection between Priam and his father and Claudius and Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus is, however, avenging the murder of his father as well as being once referred to as 'a painted tyrant' (II.2.474), so there is good reason for believing that the speech is operating simultaneously on two levels.

In a similar fashion, the Player's apostrophe of Fortune and her wheel is echoed in Rosencrantz's metaphor of the sovereign wheel of state that emphasizes the dependency of all subjects and institutions upon the single monarch. The political significance of the usurpation suffers to some

extent by the excision of this and several more key lines that develop the theme, among them Marcellus's 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark' (1.3.90) and Claudius's assertion of the importance of Polonius to the throne:

The head is not more native to the heart,
The hand more instrumental to the mouth
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father. (1.2.49)

Claudius, indeed, is made rather more shallow by the omission of two of the reasons he gives to Laertes for not taking action against the threat which Hamlet poses. No allusion is made to his consideration of Gertrude's feelings nor the love he bears her and there remains only his fear of revolution, occasioned by his stepson's popularity amongst the people. Horatio loses both his lyrical evocation of the dawn climbing over the hill in a russet mantle and his summary of the plotting and mishaps at the end (V.2. 372-377). On the other hand, he is given the lines of the anonymous Gentleman in IV.5 concerning Ophelia without delivering the full description of her mad symptoms that contrast graphically with the symptoms of Hamlet's assumed madness. The same policy of assimilation is followed with Osric, who is given some of the following Lord's lines with the Lord then disappearing as a separate character. The reallocation of speeches is, on the whole, slight, but not always without import, as in the case of Hamlet's appropriation of the Ghost's words. The play is divided up into nineteen scenes, with I.1 and IV.2 being run together as one scene. The resulting conflation means that Hamlet does not try to escape after being apprehended by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for the murder of Polonius and, instead of leading his pursuers off, is joined by the King and attendants. Claudius immediately proceeds to announce his intention of despatching his

nephew to England. The sense of a grotesque game of hide-and-seek is diminished to increase the action's momentum and avoid a change of locality. There was a ten minute interval after the seventh scene (III.1) corresponding to the placement of the interval in the 1934 production, so that the first act ended on a note of restrained and sinister anticipation instead of a strenuous climax.

The Ghost was wearing a mask when it appeared downstage in front of the battlements on which Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo stood looking down upon it. Its inhuman features and the surrounding gloom added to the aura of mystery that attended its presence. A black-out covered the transition from castle turrets to council chamber, revealing the characters already in their positions. A table was situated at centre stage with books, papers, quill pens and ink. Behind the table the King and Queen sat splendidly attired. Beside the King, on the table, was his crown. Courtiers and officials stood around the royal pair while Hamlet sat on a stool at the extreme left, facing inwards. After the relaxed and naturalistic treatment of this first court scene by Harcourt Williams and Gielgud's emphasis of the ceremonious formality and the visual opposition of Hamlet and the court, the introduction of a council table explored a new avenue. The sight of papers and writing implements and the King having doffed his crown heightened the air of businesslike administration as it muted the suggestion of ritualistic grandeur. When directing, Gielgud had underlined this much more by elevating the thrones of the royal couple and having each wear their crowns. Claudius was, on this occasion, more interested in officiating at a board meeting than in impressing upon his subjects his royal authority in full state trappings and one is reminded of Dover Wilson's argument that this scene depicts a meeting of a privy council and not a full assembly of the court (Hamlet, edited by John Dover Wilson, pp.148-149). The distinction is not absolutely clear, of course, for one

assumes that at a proper meeting others would be seated besides the King, Gertrude and Hamlet and the table would be long enough to accommodate them all, but nevertheless, concessions do seem to have been made to the argument which favours a quieter, more relaxed, less ostentatious conception of the scene. In line with this blandness of tone, the distance between Hamlet and the King was diminished and their conflict contained. An official meeting was proceeding and Hamlet had been forced to attend by virtue of his place. The scene was not allowed, however, to continue in this public vein, and, after Laertes had been granted permission to return to France, Claudius dismissed the court before turning to his stepson.

There was then a marked shift from the public to the private dimensions for the initial encounter of the two enemies and the three-cornered exchange that followed, in which Gertrude participates, took on something of the aspect of a family quarrel. It had the advantage of preventing any incongruity arising out of the silent attendance of the court during the oblique contest of Hamlet and the King and shaded more evenly into the domestic drift of the first soliloquy which was mainly preoccupied with Gertrude's betrayal of her former husband. Yet it risked creating an even greater incongruity between the royal family's seclusion and their generality of utterance. Gielgud was not happy with it, feeling that 'the formality of address used by Hamlet, and the flowery tone, half rebuking, half avuncular, of Claudius's speeches have greater point and effect when uttered for the benefit of his admiring and sycophantic courtiers' (The Hamlet Tradition', John Gielgud's Hamlet, p.123); his feeling is surely justified. Even when some allowance is made for Claudius's assumption

of a customary regal magniloquence, remarks like 'for let the world take note / You are the most immediate to our throne' (1.2.108) and his final flourish,

No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
And the King's rouse the heaven shall bruit again,
Re-speaking earthly thunder. (1.2.3)

are difficult to reconcile with the small audience of wife and nephew. So too does Hamlet's denunciation of false show lose much of its bitterly ironic attack when the floridly dressed courtiers are absent. This may account for the particular nuances of grief and emotional vulnerability that Gielgud wrung from his initial lines. Rosamund Gilder observed Hamlet's anxiety when Gertrude joined in the conversation, his change of tone evidently coinciding with the larger change of tone affected by the court's dismissal:

He listens unwillingly as his mother speaks, fearing that she will stir the deeper layers of a grief which he has held in check under the armour of a public attitude. (John Gielgud's Hamlet, p.31)

'Ay, madam it is common' (1.2.74) could easily have been spoken accusingly as if to convict the Queen of vulgarity. Gielgud pronounced it softly as if he were on the verge of tears and was fighting to retain control of his feelings. There were tears in his eyes during his assurance that there was more sincerity in him than his mourning garb could show and throughout he maintained a dejected and sorrowful posture. As soon as the King and Queen had left, he plodded slowly upstage towards the council table, beginning his soliloquy with studied underemphasis as he moved away from the audience. The set had two doors with steps leading up to them in the facing wall and, after he had paused a moment beside the table to speak, he went to one of the doors and slumped upon the adjoining step on 'that it should come to

this' (1.2.137). From here he was able to leap upright on recognizing Horatio to establish the departure of his sorrowful mood and the temporary advent of good fellowship - the abrupt reflex capturing the sudden change of tempo.

Business that had been evolved in the 1934 production was revived to convey the meeting with the Ghost, with adaptations to assimilate it into the new stage arrangement. The Ghost made its entry from behind one of the castle turrets that stood on adjacent sides and came down the winding steps that hugged the wall of the left hand tower, under suddenly dimmed lights, to the sound of an eerie wind. Hamlet stood below, on the parapet, between the two turrets, facing right, as he conversed with Horatio. The huddled forms of the men were shrouded in mist. Reading the presence of the apparition in Horatio's face, he turned gradually, protracting the movement to draw out the suspense, and fell back into his friend's arms when he saw who was approaching. The Ghost's position on the stairs and his costume exaggerated his height. Gielgud dropped to one knee and extended one of his arms in a gesture of supplication. His address to the Ghost was rich and sonorous, fraught with emotion but controlled. The collapse into Horatio's arms had registered the initial shock and now his amazement was tempered with a solemn composure. At Hamlet's request for instructions, the spirit descended the steps of the turret and began to move down the main flight that led from the parapet onto the forestage. The struggle with Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo was brief and violent. Then Hamlet was free and following the Ghost down the steps with the hilt of his sword held up like a crucifix. A black-out permitted Hamlet's friends to make an unobtrusive exit and suggested a change of locality.

A vague and dream-like quality was imparted to the conference with the Ghost through the use of a single spotlight to isolate the two figures while the rest of the stage was in darkness. The Ghost's voice was electronically amplified and distributed through several speakers so that it sounded disembodied. The lines were not spoken by the on-stage actor at all, but were the responsibility of Malcolm Keen, who also played Claudius. The elder Hamlet stood with his back to the audience before the younger, directing attention towards him. This grouping placed a heavy burden upon Gielgud's powers of mime since he had to sustain interest in the Ghost's monologue with only a few short vocal exclamations, interspersed at intervals, to mark his astonishment and horror. He was relieved of some of the pressure by the loss of twenty-five lines from the Ghost's speech, including Old Hamlet's reference to a ban upon his discovery of the secrets of purgatory and his alarming description of the physical effects of the poisoning. Even so, it must have been difficult to ensure that the speech would carry when the face of the actor who was actually speaking could not be seen and the origin of the voice was elusive. Later, the microphone was discarded and Malcolm Keen spoke the lines from behind the scenes. The giant form of the Ghost remained at the front of the stage with its back turned. The scene ended on a note of human frailty, as in 1934, with Horatio and Hamlet going off together sharing the same cape.

The gulling of Polonius was aggressively slanted because Hamlet had overheard the plot to spy upon him when he was in the company of Ophelia. The identification of the old man with a fishmonger had its acidic, bawdy connotation uppermost and the satire on the weaknesses of age was given an edge by the glances that Gielgud cast at the various parts of Polonius's anatomy as he looked up from his book to verify the items listed. Despite the acuteness of Claudius's chief counsellor - Brooks Atkinson called him

'no doddering old fool but a credible old man with the grooved mind of a trained statesman' (New York Times, 9.10.1936) - he was completely taken in by Hamlet's disguise, which consisted of tangled hair, an unbuttoned jerkin and untied garters. The actor's actual impersonation of a madman was confined to the placing of a hand on top of his head and a jerky gait indicative of broad and transparent caricature. It was a mask that he could put on or take off at will and this was made clear at the end of the interview when Polonius departed and Hamlet temporarily dropped back into an unfeigned manner for his covert dismissal: 'These tedious old fools!' (II.1.218). The arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern took him by surprise. In an instant he had again assumed the antic disposition and was lolling against the right hand door as he heard them approaching from the left. Recognizing them, it was put off once more and he welcomed his two friends sincerely. Thus Gielgud drew a firm line between Hamlet's role playing and his true identity. His manipulation of appearances was deliberate and overt.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's enjoyment of his favour was short-lived, however, for, by the time Hamlet's aside had been reached 'Nay, then I have an eye of you' (II.2.289), his suspicions that they had been sent to spy upon him were confirmed. Going over to the table and leafing through a book, he suddenly slammed it shut, interrupting their furtive consultation, and saying, in soft, lacerating tones that made it quite clear that he would have nothing more to do with them,

I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation prevent
your discovery, and your secrecy to the King and
Queen moult no feather. (II.2.292)

His friends became quickly identified with the sycophantic time-servers that he denounced. Rosencrantz was wearing a medallion containing Claudius's

miniature and, as Hamlet complained of the persons once contemptuous now paying for the new King's picture, he grabbed the medallion and threw it sideways. As far as he was concerned, from now on the two men were the King's allies.

Towards the players he behaved familiarly, but with an awareness of the social distinctions which separated them from him. Gielgud was concerned to preserve the princely bearing of the character even when he was at his most convivial. This came out in the testy glance he shot at the acting troupe as they laughed at his mockery of Polonius's preference for jigs and tales of bawdry, followed by his inflection of 'Follow that lord: and look YOU mock him not' (II.2.538). It was a privilege that he possessed, but which could not be tolerated in the players. Significantly, when he is alone, Hamlet abuses himself in terms of his common baseness. The pariah status of the 'rogue' and the low caste of the 'peasant slave' are especially abhorrent to him. Many commentators have taken the view that the Player's speech is intended to be a piece of burlesque parodying an outmoded literary style, but this is to introduce a disparity between the audience's awareness of the speech and that of Hamlet, who appreciates it and shows disapproval for Polonius when he does not do so. If the speech is heavily parodied in performance it then becomes incumbent upon the actor playing Hamlet to respond to the parody in some way. Should he try to ignore the comedy he is apt to appear insensitive. Should he respond to it, the power of the speech to awake passion in its hearers is placed in doubt and this destroys the basis of the comparison that Hamlet makes in his soliloquy between the power of dramatic art to move and his own much greater motive and cue for feeling. Gielgud sat quietly in a chair to listen, his expression becoming gradually suffused with sympathy, resenting the interruption of Polonius that drew him out of his reverie. The interjection 'the mobled queen' (II.2.496)

was spoken in a rapt utterance as if he were relishing the phrase in his vision and not as if it were distasteful to him. This quiet and attentive attitude then caused the sudden start he gave upon hearing the description of Hecuba, to stand out. Immediately, he covered his face with his hands showing that the inspiration for the play had occurred to him, anticipating the idea that he was to announce soon afterwards in soliloquy.

It was appropriate that he should signify his surprise at that moment because it is the detail of Hecuba that Hamlet seizes upon when he is alone and not the grisly act of revenge itself. This soliloquy divides into three movements, each with a distinctive tempo and rhythm, that were communicated histrionically. The first section is concerned with the Player and steadily builds in climbing phrases, each one rising above the other, to the cataclysmic effect that such an actor, given Hamlet's passionate stimulus, would have upon an audience. The second section is concerned with self-abasement and progresses through rhythmic staccato to the furious shout for vengeance. The third section is more controlled and purposeful and centres on the invention of a plan to ascertain Claudius's guilt through the agency of a play. In general outline the soliloquy is similar to the player's recitation with which it is paired, beginning in a major key, the attention fixed on one character (Pyrrhus in the Player's case and the Player in Hamlet's), reaching a crescendo in the middle (the Player's apostrophe to Fortune and Hamlet's cry for vengeance) and ending in a different key (the pathos of Hecuba for the Player and the pensive collection of the wits for Hamlet). Gielgud underscored each of these transitions by adapting his style of delivery so that the soliloquy would emerge as an orchestrated whole. Section one was spoken while leaning against a table at the centre, half turned from the audience. When he came to 'He would drown the stage with tears' (II.2.555) he whirled round to look straight ahead, raising his voice to a shout that culminated in a climax on the evocation of the amazement

the Player would cause. This outburst left him drained and he crumpled onto a stool that stood to the left of the table, his voice and entire aspect seemingly shrunken. The beginning of section two was spoken sitting down, soon becoming a series of rapid volleys that eventually brought him to his feet on the false climax of a rising question: 'who does me this?' (III.1.569). Then he reeled against the table, half falling back on the stool in a gesture of submission coinciding with his admitted acquiescence - 'Swounds, I should take it;' (II.2.571). The force of his shout for vengeance brought this second movement to its peak and, to accentuate its violence, Gielgud drew his dagger and rushed across the stage to crash against the closed door on the right. The weapon fell from his hand and rolled across the floor as he sank impotently onto the threshold step. The ferocity of the movement was perhaps slightly exaggerated since it rather disguised Hamlet's misguided impulses, suggesting that he had been trying to work himself up to do the deed when, in fact, he is striving to capture an emotion that will create a general stir. The impediment to his purpose is, so he infers here, his pigeon liver that prevents him from being sufficiently moved by the grievance that has been committed. He is not primarily contemplating any kind of action, only his want of feeling. Derek Jacobi's business of raising a prop sword and striking a theatrical attitude was better designed to communicate Hamlet's motivation (Old Vic, 1977). He is envious of the Player's ability to experience passion imaginatively through his art. He conceptualizes the universal consternation that the wrong which has been done to him would be capable of causing were it linked to a dramatic performance; he tries to recreate the indignation within himself. But he never approaches a practical assessment of the task until he hits upon the idea of the play and then the methodical thinking that he does is all about the way to uncover Claudius's guilt. So there is always a distance between the act of revenge and the urge to feel the appropriate emotions and take the appropriate measures

that runs counter to the business that Gielgud had introduced. Nevertheless, the action with the dagger created an arresting juxtaposition with the business that was used at the end of the speech to bring down the curtain. The last movement of the soliloquy was spoken in an agitated whisper as Hamlet rose from the step and came forward to pronounce the final couplet. Instead of leaving the stage, Gielgud chose to conclude on a high note by sitting down at the table with pen and paper in hand to compose the lines that he would insert into 'The Murder of Gonzago', another borrowing from Irving. The stage was blacked out on the tableau of him hunched over the page, furiously scribbling. The futile motion with the dagger and his fluent manipulation of the quill pen would contrast Hamlet's indulgence in two kinds of differentiated activity.

The next scene was built up around a central platform with flights of steps leading up to it from the left and the right. Above the platform was a high arched doorway opening on a corridor with wall hangings. Beneath was another archway. On either side were two doors that gave out onto landings. Each had a few treads before it that connected those entrances with the stage level. The set had a concave wall that gave the impression of a great hallway in a castle. It was a lay-out that allowed the actors to come on and depart from six different angles including hidden side exits.

The King and Polonius secreted themselves behind the tapestries within the upper archway and did their spying from there. Ophelia had temporarily left the stage when Hamlet came in for the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy.

Gielgud's entrance caught up the mood of 'the rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy before he lapsed into calm.

He comes in blown on the wind of his excitement.
 He has been sent for, probably for no good purpose.
 He looks around questioning, defiant. Then, seeing
 no one, drops into his own brooding thoughts.
 (John Gielgud's Hamlet, p.66)

Here we see how the continuity of the play and the musical movements of the different soliloquies were coming to be conceived as a process of mental development. The visible transition of Hamlet's mind not only heightens, through contrast 'To be or not to be', it underlines his mental restlessness. The first six words of the soliloquy were spoken while still on the stairway. Then he descended the three steps from the door and came forward. His movements were expressive of the flow of the discourse and paralleled the rhythmic beat of the lines. As he reached 'Ay, there's the rub' (III.1.55), the phrase that hinders the hitherto stately and somnolent progression, he hesitated and his feet ceased to pace. The broad universal level of the contemplation was preserved in the evocation of an imaginary dagger which Gielgud seemed to hold in his outstretched palm, pausing once more. The bourn of the undiscovered country was dwelt upon in silent speculation. At the realization that it is this mystery which 'puzzles the will' an undercurrent of uncertainty was introduced as the speaker started to walk from side to side, treading the maze of his thoughts.

Ophelia's entry from above, through the middle arch, recalled the plot to his mind and prompted him to escape via the door on the right. Yet he checked this impulse and turned back towards her. His wavering here symbolized the crossed purposes with which the colloquy with Polonius's daughter was charged. Gentleness and brutality fired by the knowledge that Ophelia was the bait in a trap devised by his enemies invested Gielgud's interpretation with a blend of conflicting impulses. 'Nymph in thy orisons / Be all my sins rememb'ed.' (III.1.89) was a question directed to Ophelia, standing above him on the level, half way down the stairs. Her

offer to return his gifts, in this case a token string of pearls, awoke his animosity, for it was plainly a piece of behaviour prescribed by the two spies who remained hidden somewhere in the chamber. The rejoinder he made was a snapping denial. However, Gielgud often injected a subtextual meaning into the lines which softened his manifest cruelty and accentuated the ambiguity of his responses. On roughly seizing Ophelia for interrogation, his 'Are you honest?' (III.1.103) was not the question of the inquisitor that it could easily seem to be. Instead he slanted it to suggest that he was trying to get Ophelia to make a sincere confession of her feelings. After he had bounded away to the stairs, denying that he ever loved her, he realized the distress that his words had caused and ran back, arms raised in a gesture of embrace, then thought better of it. 'Get thee to a nunnery' (III.1.121) was at first a gentle plea without any bawdy connotation. The faults that Hamlet accuses himself of might raise the expectation that he was trying to intimidate the eavesdroppers, particularly as his knowledge of the plot had been affirmed by the production. They were, nevertheless, delivered as though he were still intent on drawing a confession from Ophelia by admitting faults in himself. She was being offered an example of how penance could be attained. It was only on her blatant lie concerning the whereabouts of her father that he finally lost control and threw her to the ground, throwing the string of pearls after her. He ran off to the left and returned on the raised level to curse her marriage. His final departure was made through the low arch beneath the platform in a clumsy, groping manner, having held up two hands to block out the image of Ophelia's face.

'The Murder of Gonzago' was performed on the main stage, with the King and Queen sitting together, above, on the platform. (The basic features of the set were unaltered from the nunnery scene.) Courtiers were ranged along the platform and the steps. Hamlet sat with Ophelia to the right of

the platform, just at the top of the stairs, and slightly behind the King and Queen. But this was not a good position for him to be able to watch Claudius's reactions and Gielgud was required to come down onto each of the landings, crossing behind the thrones, to scrutinize his Uncle and Mother and, at the same time, be close to the players. This gave rise to a pendulum effect whereby Hamlet moved first to one side to observe Gertrude and then to the other to observe Claudius, slipping many of his provocative comments casually into their ears, from behind, as he went past. It was also useful in clarifying the fact that he was as much concerned with uncovering his mother's guilt as that of Claudius, for he had to go to opposite ends of the stairway to devote to each of them a share of his attention. The old problem remained of the players having to perform before an onstage audience whose angle of vision was diametrically opposed to that of the real audience. The cutting of the Dumb Show allowed Hamlet to proceed immediately to the baiting of the Queen, with Gielgud directing attention towards her early on by underscoring where he meant his remark upon the brevity of woman's love to apply. Although this retort is provoked by something that Ophelia says, Hamlet was already behind Gertrude, taunting her with its personal imputation, making his neglect of Ophelia more noticeable. With two manuscript pages in his hand, presumably those he had written, he fulfilled the functions of director, presenter and audience, linking the worlds of the stylized, murder tragedy, the court of Elsinore and the real spectators. On the brink of the landing he egged the players forwards, conducting their speeches, criticizing and appreciating their acting with his 'Wormwood, wormwood' (III.2.176) and 'if she should break it now' (III.2.219) and then suddenly standing, with a decorous wave of his arm, to invite his mother's special notice of the Player Queen's protestations. Still Gertrude gave no indication of any knowledge of the murder, delivering her brief judgement on the play in a quiet and ingenuous manner. With Claudius, Hamlet had more success. The line 'poison in jest' (III.2.229)

was slyly insinuated into the King's ear even as Lucianus was about to pour the deadly concoction into the ear of the sleeping victim. Then Hamlet was upon the left landing, making light of the whole matter. At the sound of his nephew's hand striking the script to dismiss it as a knavish piece of work, the King flinched. A moment later his composure had collapsed altogether. Rising to his feet, he was prevented from coming down the steps by Hamlet rushing towards him, a triumphant shout of 'false fire' on his lips. As the King retreated, the court broke up in confusion, leaving the Prince at the centre of the stage, victorious, standing upon the throne that his uncle had just vacated, wildly waving in the air the manuscript pages that were finally torn to pieces in his excitement. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, coming to summon Hamlet to his mother's closet, were faced by the image of the Prince enthroned. The act of usurpation they had witnessed in the play was seemingly confirmed by Hamlet's attitude. To dismiss them he again broke the recorder across his knee and handed a piece to each of the false friends.

The King knelt at a prie-dieu to pray, so that there was visual warrant for the conclusion to which his assassin jumps that he is confessing himself. Gielgud's appearance from behind a curtained doorway was sudden and unexpected. A brief flurry of the curtains and he was there. A few moments earlier Claudius, thinking he had heard something, had gone over to the same doorway and pulled back the curtain only to find the alcove empty. Hamlet was halfway across the stage before he noticed the praying figure and his surprise was evident in the way he stopped quickly and recoiled, grabbing the back of a chair to check his progress. The interlude was played on the full stage without any division of the playing area to incorporate Gertrude's closet, whereas the prayer and closet scenes had been linked in Gielgud's and Harcourt Williams's productions. Continuity was preserved, however, through the retention of the business of Hamlet picking up Claudius's

sword to execute the fatal deed. He then carried this with him onto his mother's closet. The ending of the present scene and the beginning of the next were overlapped by having Claudius rise from his prayer to discover that his weapon was missing and then, immediately afterwards, hear his nephew's voice from the wings calling 'mother'. When Hamlet's voice was heard again, on the threshold of the Queen's chamber, calling out the same word, it was apparent that only several seconds had elapsed.

A bed with an overhanging gold canopy and long grey and orange drapes dominated the centre of the stage for the confrontation between mother and son and became the prime focal point of the stormy encounter. Behind these curtains Polonius had to do his spying and Hamlet jumped on to it to deliver his death blow. He forced Gertrude down onto the bed by grabbing her arm and pushing her backwards:

Peace, sit you down,
And let me wring your heart; for so I shall,
If it be made of penetrable stuff; (III.4.34)

When he subsequently joined her, the two struggled together, Gertrude throwing herself forward to be embraced and Hamlet beating her off. Still his treatment of his mother was not all brutal and Gielgud tempered Hamlet's cruelty with indications of gentleness, allowing his head to rest upon her breast as he bade her good night and kissing her shoulder to underline his confession that he must be cruel only to be kind. Just before Hamlet leaves the bedchamber his words are harsh, self-sufficient and resolute and he even indulges his sardonic wit in a morbid pun: 'Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you' (III.3.216). The very last remark he makes, however, glances at his blood connection with the woman he has attacked so bitterly and is a simple, abbreviated good night which sounds mundane after the furious clash that has just taken place. One way of reading it would be to extend the grimly humorous mood of the preceding line into this one, showing up

its inappropriateness. How is it possible for Gertrude to have a 'good night' after someone has been murdered in her bedroom and she herself has been accused of murder and betrayal? Hamlet could be making another bad joke. Gielgud made the last word 'mother' plaintive and desperate. The queen had already departed and so it came as an introverted parenthesis, once more emphasizing Hamlet's vulnerability and alienation, like the business with Horatio's cloak after the Ghost had been spoken to.

Hamlet's final soliloquy, disclosed a calmer temperament more composed and less apt to express itself in fits and starts of passion. Whilst there is a characteristic, questioning irony hanging over his admiration of Fortinbras's endeavour, a cause whose end is futile, the tenor of the speech is positive and affirms what this delicate and tender Prince is engaged in, despite the loss of human life and the worthlessness of the prize. The ideas are coherent and pursue a line of argument to a definite conclusion. There is a gradual build up to the emergence of the prognostication which Hamlet draws from experience that his thoughts will, in future, be bloody and the arrangement of units prior to that gives to the speech a solid, cumulative impact. Gielgud began quietly and mounted slowly to the final line that resonated with determination. The martial ethos of the soliloquy, which has a significant part to play in suggesting Hamlet's gathering strength and decision to act, was distilled in the attitude he struck at the end. He threw his head back, straightened his shoulders and stiffened his arms, grasping the hem of his cloak. This posture was complemented by the firmness and assurance of his delivery.

Ophelia's madness followed. The disarray of Lilian Gish's Ophelia with her hair unpinned, a stocking over her arm and the non-existent flowers she pretended to hold, contrasted with the orderly attire and aura of self-possession that Hamlet projected in the graveyard scene, though it did not

prevent her from attaining to what The New York Herald Tribune (9.10.1936) called 'a poignant beauty seldom brought to the role'. Hamlet was next seen in a hat and long travelling cloak, detached and at his ease, descending the staircase that clung to the side of a church tower. From his sleeve he produced a snuff box and took a pinch, offering the box to the gravedigger with a relaxed and aristocratic gesture. When the funeral procession arrived, he and Horatio withdrew into the shadow of the church while the mourners arranged themselves around the grave. Owing to the elevated platform above the sepulchre, it was possible for Gielgud to climb up behind the funeral party during Laertes's elegy and look down into the pit. From here he could break into the midst of the mourners by stepping down the stairs onto the landing, throwing off his cloak as he announced himself: 'This is I,/ Hamlet the Dane' (V.1.251). Laertes leapt up to him and the two men grappled on the landing.

The exchange with Osric was played quickly and lightly with the ludicrous aspect of the character highlighted. Hamlet treated him with good natured condescension rather than with scathing sarcasm and this helped to establish the generosity and freedom from contriving that are alluded to by Claudius. Gielgud was gentle in his mockery of the fantastic courtier and gayly jibing as he suggested Osric should deliver his acceptance of the duel after what flourish his nature pleased. He was aided in this by the cutting of a remark that Hamlet makes which shows him to have a foreknowledge of Osric's disposition and to take a dim view of his nearness to the King. The following passage, struck out of the promptbook, shows an Osric slightly more sinister owing to his acquaintance with the corrupt standards of the court - a beast man akin to the satyr figure of Claudius:

(Aside to Horatio)

Thy state is the more gracious, for 'tis a vice
to know him. He hath much land, and fertile.
Let a beast be lord of beasts, and his crib shall
stand at the king's mess. 'Tis a chough; but as I
say, spacious in the possession of dirt. (V.2.85)

Osric owns the same earth that the clown shovels to make graves. He is also entrusted with the bait that will spring the trap to bring about the death of the Prince.

Hamlet's awareness of fatality was made apparent afterwards in the perfect stillness and balanced simplicity of his stoic dictum:

Not a whit, we defy augury: there is a special
providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now,
'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will
be now, if it be not now, yet it will come - the
readiness is all. (V.2.211)

There was a resigned, unhurried spirituality in the solemn pauses. He took Horatio by the arm to reinforce the earnestness of the summarizing 'Let be'.

The duel was fought all across the main stage with the King and Queen looking down from the middle landing, on the right, halfway up the stairs that gave out onto the central platform and the great arched doorway. Behind them was a table with goblets and wine. The courtiers were spread out over the central platform and down each of the flights of steps leading up to it. Above, the concave walls of the chamber ended in battlements and above them the sky. The full width of Jo Mielziner's heavy, architectural set was used rather as it had been in the play scene, creating a kind of reprise, establishing a sense of inevitable fate. The wheel had come full circle. The grouping was the exact obverse of the 1934 production where the King and Queen had sat on a lower level looking upwards at the duellists fighting upon a scaffold. Both the King and Hamlet were required to move

about a great deal in order to spread their influence, climbing the stairways for the purposes of emphasis. The Queen, on the contrary, was assigned to a relatively minor position, seated on a chair to one side, and it was necessary for her to come forward when she was exchanging pleasantries with Hamlet so that her presence could be felt. Under Gielgud's direction Gertrude had been allowed more importance. At first the King stood at the front of the stage, to the left, where he could join the contestants hands together before their bout. Only after he had given a signal to his confederate to indicate the poisoned foil while Hamlet's back was turned did he join the Queen as a spectator.

The fight swung round the main playing area in circles so that Hamlet found himself standing on alternate sides: on the left to refuse the poisoned cup that the King had risen to offer him and on the right to accept a kiss from his mother and to allow her to wipe his sweaty brow with a handkerchief. During the third bout, Hamlet took possession of the unbated foil by coming in underneath Laertes's guard and seizing the weapon. Having already dropped his dagger on receiving his death wound, he was left temporarily in charge of both foils. Then he tossed his own weapon back to Laertes and the fight continued with Hamlet wielding the poisoned sword. After his assailant had been despatched below the left stairway, a cry from the Queen brought him up to her level to support her in his arms as she collapsed. Her disclosure that she is poisoned caused him to run up the remaining stairs to prevent the escape of the murderer. But the King, instead, was making his way towards Laertes, with sword drawn ligo-like, to prevent him from making a full confession. Hamlet's final assassination of Claudius was therefore strongly endorsed by the attendant business which revealed him to be not only armed, but about to commit a further murder. The text, of course, provides no evidence that Claudius resists the coup de grace when it comes other than by appealing to the onlookers for help. Nor need he

have a weapon about his person. Even after he has incurred responsibility for the deaths of Hamlet, Laertes and Gertrude his murder can then arouse ambivalent feelings as his defenceless body is stabbed. Nevertheless, Gielgud's Hamlet was given a potent compulsion to act and he did so with spectacular alacrity. From the top of the stairs he turned and jumped down upon the King, instantaneously disarming him and plunging home the unbated sword. The sensational movement provided a fitting climax to a scene that deals with a series of sensational deaths. Still Claudius did not die immediately. There was enough time left for him to reel up the left stairway to try and make good an escape while Hamlet pursued him, via the opposite stairway, with the poisoned cup. They struggled on the elevated platform where the King finally collapsed - any danger of bathos being thus offset by having the bodies distributed a considerable distance from one another on various levels.

Hamlet dies in Horatio's arms as the numbing poison creeps over his body. But the problem for the actor is that he has to go on speaking right up until his last breath while he appears to be dying. It is not easy to command anyone's attention when you are lying on the floor, even if your head and shoulders are being supported. Forbes-Robertson got round this problem by collapsing onto the throne and dying with his back straight, held up by the chair, an appropriate symbolic attitude to end on that underlined Fortinbras's words: 'For he was likely, had he been put on,/ To have prov'd most royal;' (V.2.389).⁴ Other productions have placed Horatio and Hamlet on a higher level. Gielgud was attracted, at first, to Forbes-Robertson's solution, but was eventually persuaded by Guthrie McClintic to adopt a different alternative.

McClintic suddenly said 'I think you ought to die standing up' and I said that was impossible, 'I can't; it's impossible. How can I play those speeches' - and then I tried it and it really was rather effective because when I said, 'the

rest is silence', I just suddenly crumpled up in his arms and he laid me down. And I think it was rather marvellous because it held the audience's attention more. The moment you become recumbent it's like the death of Nelson - you know - 'Kiss me, Hardy'. The audience knows it's all over and it's a very long play and the other kind of... kept a sort of - like a question mark in a way.⁵

Standing with one arm paralysed at his side, the other raised to salute Fortinbras's arrival, he maintained a commanding presence until he had spoken the final syllables and then his head dropped forward and his body slumped into Horatio's arms and he was lowered gently to the ground. The suddenness of death seemed to surprise him and he expired on a tenuous note that left the impression that he had more to say. Fortinbras, finally, returned Hamlet's salute with his sword as the four captains lifted the body and the stage lights were dimmed.

Critical reaction to Gielgud's Hamlet illustrated the different emphasis of playing traditions on the other side of the Atlantic. John Barrymore was the actor American audiences most closely associated with the role of Hamlet and Gielgud's performances tended to be evaluated in the light of his.⁶ Barrymore was a robust actor with a flair for fiery rhetoric and sardonic humour, though he was capable of tenderness as well, as he demonstrated at the end of the closet scene with Gertrude. Like Olivier, he placed a strong emphasis on the Oedipal side of Hamlet's nature and kissed and fondled the Queen a great deal. He performed in a fairly heavily cut version of the play and represented a mature Prince. Gielgud had seen him as Hamlet when Barrymore was forty-five and admired his humour and demonic energy, but had thought his emphasis on Hamlet's relationship with his mother 'a bit sentimental'.⁷ Gielgud's Hamlet was based on a different conception to Barrymore's though he too sought to capture the sardonic, demonic side of the part in his own fashion. He said to Martin Jenkins:

most of the Hamlets that I saw as a young man were very heavy and rather doleful and it made me realise that there was an enormous demonic humour in the character...

In all the sort of humourous scenes: the coddling of Polonius and the recorders scene and so on. And I have always thought that my successes, such as they were, in serious parts, were helped by the fact that I have always tried to find the comedy in tragic parts, and Edith Evans showed me that, very early on, when she played Arkadina, for instance, in The Seagull... It is wonderful to find the other side of a part because that the actor can put in. The author has written the part, but it is for the actor to find either the fun or the seriousness... So there is this two sides and life, after all, is also tragic and comic and therefore on the stage one should always try and show both sides of it I think, if one can.⁸

Unlike Barrymore, he did not especially emphasize Hamlet's relationship with his mother and this brought the paternal relationship more into focus. The New York Times (Brooks Atkinson, 9.10.1936) said, 'the closet scene was not played with the intensity of Barrymore who suggested Oedipal longings. The current Hamlet is carefully concerned with the wrongs done to his father, rather than with any intense feeling towards his mother.'

In the light of the Barrymore tradition Gielgud's performance was controversial. He was younger, more appealing, more subtle and lucid, less artificial than Barrymore, who did not have the advantages of the fuller text to speak. Yet he was not so strident, tempestuous and boldly declamatory. Reviewers missed the thrilling Barrymore panache that had wrung the emotion out of the big speeches and seemed to probe the shadow side of Hamlet's psyche. Gielgud's interpretation was recognised as being the more faithful and illuminating, but, as it was deliberately designed to counteract the excesses of romantic playing, it dispensed with many of the more obvious effects. Barrymore, who had played Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde on film, displayed a vein of melodrama in his interpretation that had been very effective.

It is a paradox of Hamlet that vigorous actors who know a good deal less about the character than Mr. Gielgud does can make horror more harrowing and tragedy more deeply felt.

(New York Times reprinted in News Chronicle, 10.10.1936)

said The New York Times conscious of the rift in acting styles. The New York Journal thought Gielgud's interpretation displayed 'intelligence, vocal eloquence and occasional intuition', but concluded 'his performance is disappointing, it is not within hailing distance of Barrymore's'.

At the heart of the disagreement was the way in which the two actors spoke the verse. Barrymore gave forceful projection to the soliloquies and could command the savage, mocking tone of 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I' with great conviction. He had a moody, Irvingesque quality and a dashing flamboyant delivery that underlined the vivid, heightened characteristics of the language, but he was inclined to overplay and become emotionally self-indulgent. Gielgud acted with greater economy, risked underplaying rather than overplaying, was sullen, bitter, slightly neurotic, and, above all, spontaneous and direct. He spoke the lines clearly, fluently, musically, without exhibitionism, with the result that it was the mind of Hamlet, rather than the words themselves, which stood out. The reviewer of The New York Herald Tribune, avowedly deriving his standard of excellence from Barrymore, found Gielgud wanting in that 'bitter self-destroying sense of fun' and 'thrilling, {one notes the adjective} theatrical eloquence'. He mentioned that Gielgud 'in the determination to avoid any possible suggestion of ranting managed to lose some of the great poetry of the lines'. Yet

he never fails to make everything he says significant and thoughtful.

It is that thoughtfulness which is the most distinguished quality of the Gielgud characterization. Every speech comes from him as if it had arisen from the depth of his embittered mind. The famous soliloquy is spoken, not with the fiery Barrymore eloquence but as if it were really a debate going on in the brain of the man; the careful result of his tortured contemplation.

The verdict was that 'His Hamlet is not passionate, but it is brooding and neurotic'.

Brooks Atkinson's description of Gielgud in the role highlighted his swift, articulate style of speech which was much more lightly stressed than American audiences were used to. Like the English reviewers of the 1929 and 1931 Old Vic performances, he found that the new style, combined with Gielgud's youth and vitality, revitalized the play. The lines sounded fresh, contemporary:

For this is no roaring robustious Hamlet lost in melancholy, but an appealing young man brimming over with grief. His suffering is that of a cultivated youth whose affections are warm and whose honour is bright. Far from being a traditional Hamlet, beating the bass notes of some mighty lines, Mr. Gielgud speaks the lines with the quick spontaneity of a modern man. His emotions are keen. He looks on tragedy with the clarity of the mind's eye.

This is one way of modernizing the character, but it is accomplished somewhat at the expense of the full-blooded verse of Shakespeare. (New York Times, 9.10.1936)

One might almost think that the lines had been altered to support some original, revolutionary interpretation. Yet Gielgud's Hamlet was more faithful to the full text than most others of his day and he deliberately avoided any slanted readings that would require the spectators to make any major conceptual adjustments. It was the way he spoke and the way he acted, simply, directly, economically that was so unusual. The New York Herald Tribune (9.10.1936) thought that he brought off Hamlet's prose

speeches particularly well, but was less successful with the metrical ones. Gielgud's vocal technique, though it must have been more assured than in the Old Vic days, was said to have sacrificed too much to achieve an easy, relaxed and intimate tone. It needed to be more obtrusive to highlight the splendour of the poetry. The New York American and The World Telegram (re-printed in News Chronicle, 10.10.1936) were readier to accept the new Hamlet. The World Telegram called it 'an exalted experience' while The New York American's encomium went even further: 'I have I think many a firm reason to prefer this young Hamlet of Gielgud's to any other I have seen or heard of'.

* * *

1939 saw the closing of the Lyceum Theatre at the beginning of the War. The presentation of Gielgud's fourth Hamlet was given at Irving's old theatre for six days, before transferring to Denmark, as a celebration of the Lyceum's strategic place in the history of the English stage. The production, which came under Gielgud's aegis, was primarily designed for performance in the open air in the courtyard of the Renaissance palace at Elsinore. The set was adapted so that it would also be possible to perform the play behind the proscenium arch at the Lyceum, with little rearrangement of essentials. This led to the construction of a thrust stage along the lines of the Elizabethan platform, backed by a curtained penthouse inside which simple pieces of scenery could be set. When all the curtains were drawn it was possible to look right through the penthouse to the facade of the palace beyond. On either side were two flanking entranceways defined by arches that allowed for unusually deep entrances and departures. Whilst the play was being performed in London this structure was erected on the Lyceum stage behind the proscenium so that the impression was of a projecting Elizabethan scaffold within a picture frame like the effect William Poel had contrived in his production of Measure for Measure (Royalty Theatre, 1893). It appeared, unfortunately,

rather constrained at the Lyceum, where the frequent use of the apron could not prevent the action from being stifled. Audrey Williamson wrote:

John Gielgud's production seemed astonishingly cramped considering that it was designed for the performances at Elsinore the following week. Those brilliant young artists 'Motley', here failed to repeat the spaciousness and pastel clear dignity of some of their earlier settings. One cannot see these rich but finicky interiors, nor this wonderful strange millinery, against the lovely Kronborg background of stone and sky. (Theatre of Two Decades, p.266)

But in fact, in the open air, with the audience on three sides of the platform and with the addition of flags on the stage perimeter that fluttered in the wind, the breadth and scope of the playing was increased considerably. Gielgud had at first contemplated using a wider platform of the kind used by Laurence Olivier in Tyrone Guthrie's production that had inaugurated the custom of performing Hamlet at Elsinore Castle, but had eventually abandoned the idea because it did not suit his conception of council chambers, passages and anterooms that would be easier to capture in a more confined space. It was his intention to create an atmosphere of intrigue and corruption as it was imaged in the feasting and debauchery of the King and Queen, and the spying of their agents (John Gielgud, 'Hamlet at Kronborg', Elsinore Programme). Costumes were similar to those that had been employed for the 1934 revival, emphasizing arms and shoulders through the use of fringes and necklace accoutrements and this was demonstrated especially in the uniforms of the palace guard who wore flat, circular hats and voluminous fringed sleeves while carrying pikes that are obviously derivative. Hamlet owed less to Gielgud's earlier appearances and in the fringed wig, padded velvet doublet and high circular collar, almost like that of a clergyman, minor innovations may be discerned. The severer, more mature, less romantic Hamlet



8. Hamlet, Elsinore Castle, 1939

constituted a baleful presence in the magnificent, luxurious court of Denmark (Plate 8). The play was divided up into four parts by two intervals situated after I.5 and IV.4 according to the advice in Granville-Barker's Preface, which allowed the densely packed middle section of the play, from Hamlet's intrusion into Ophelia's chamber to his departure for England, to be played without a break. Granville-Barker's critical commentary on Hamlet was indeed consulted closely at every point and was a decisive factor in shaping the performed text, as too was his personal advice given in an interview after he had attended a rehearsal run-through. Not only did he help to shape Gielgud's understanding of the broad development of the character, getting him to lighten and uplift the final scenes from the graveyard onwards in order to accentuate the fey mood, encouraging Gielgud to adopt 'a jocose manner', he also concentrated on details of line inflection, at the beginning of the closet scene, for example, to sustain the strength and urgency of attack that was required. In this way he was reinforcing the director's own efforts to lay stress upon the delivery of the verse as opposed to the psychological complexities of characterization. In an interview given to The Observer (25.6.1939), Gielgud declared that 'we are in danger of losing the purely vocal magic of Shakespeare in our concern with psychological problems'. His aim was to avoid oversubtlety and concentrate on good speaking and broad effects which would carry in the open. Possibly he was reacting too strongly against the trend towards involved and over-subtle interpretations, instanced in his rejection of the Oedipus complex theory to account for Hamlet's delay, when he went on to assert that Shakespeare 'would be unlikely to put more into a play than an audience would be likely to understand in a single performance'. Without qualification, this statement seems doubtful. But it sorted well with his simplified method of staging and his striving after directness of communication and theatrical eloquence designed to complement the outdoor conditions of playing to a foreign audience.

The imminence of war imparted a certain restlessness to the performance which was epitomised by the presence of two German U-boats in the nearby harbour. The sound of the shipwright's hammers mingled with Marcellus's words adding to the unease of the opening:

Good now, sit down, and tell me, he that knows,
 Why this same strict and most observant watch
 So nightly toils the subject of the land;
 And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,
 And foreign mart for implements of war;
 Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
 Does not divide the Sunday from the week;
 What might be toward, that this sweaty haste
 Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day:
 Who is't that can inform me ? (1.1.70)

Nevertheless, conditions were far from perfect and the frequent rain and cold together with the lightness of the early evening jarred with the production's atmosphere. Both the actors and the audience were disconcerted by the light, which contradicted the midnight beginning of the play. Gielgud declared that the scenes were utterly lacking in atmosphere (Stage Directions, p.95) and it was objected that Bernardo's challenging 'Who's there?' (1.1.1) was spoken to someone that he could easily see (Listener, 13.7.1939). Not surprisingly, modern audiences were less able to discount these particulars than were their Elizabethan forbears. Still there were some striking moments such as the Ghost's long entrances made on either side of the penthouse, accompanied by sepulchral music. The depth of these entrances suggested that he was coming from a far distance. His disappearance was effected by the simple measure of having him step behind the curtain that screened the inner stage. Minutes later the curtain was opened to reveal the King and Queen in state, attended by councillors.

They were seated behind a long table with Gertrude on the King's right hand and Polonius on the left. Claudius's Switzers stood behind and

at each end of the table. Hamlet was nowhere to be seen. It was Granville-Barker's idea to have him come on late and take his place at the right end of the table during Claudius's speech, where he proceeded to fidget and doodle upon the papers spread in front of him. The most significant point here is that the table, used in 1936 to isolate the King and Queen, has been extended in length to include the councillors, and this second scene now begins to look more like a council meeting with the presence of official documents before the council members. Hamlet, as the next in line to the throne, has been compelled to attend the meeting, but his reluctance to do so is figured in his late arrival and his distracted movements. The coincidence of the Ghost's departure and the discovery of the King was occasioned by the doubling of these two roles by Jack Hawkins - an innovation that Gielgud had long ago been planning ('The Hamlet Tradition', John Gielgud's Hamlet, p.138). It concentrated the ambivalence of Hamlet's attitudes towards his father and Uncle. Hawkins's King was gaunt and predatory without the corpulent indulgence of Frank Vosper (1934) although he was shown drinking in the first court scene. Ivor Brown called him 'wolvish rather than "bloat"' (Observer, 2.7.1939). He distinguished the Ghost from Claudius by investing the former with chill gravity and pathos. When he related the tale of his sufferings he was transfigured by the anguish of reliving his own death throes. Hamlet's first soliloquy was taut with nervous tension and forced at the end according to one critic (Birmingham Reference Library). This was soon made up for, however, in the conversation with the Ghost where Gielgud forcefully established the passionate tie between father and son. As this episode drew to its close and the Ghost vanished he cowered and trembled fitfully to indicate his traumatic exhaustion then rose to a hysterical pitch before the interval interrupted the performance.

The 'fishmonger' colloquy with Polonius was aided by Gielgud's long experience of playing with George Howe. (He had played Polonius in the 1934 production.) This shrewd, nimble and elvish old man, with white beard and cropped hair, was an excellent target for the bitter and ironic wit of the Prince. Speaking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and then the players Hamlet was relaxed and seemingly free of the mental inhibitions that tormented him elsewhere. The result of these temporary periods of repose was to bring out the surges of activity and crippling frustration as they are expressed in the soliloquies and the shending of Ophelia. As he apostrophized the heavens in front of the perplexed Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet stood forward so that he was able to look up into the real clouded sky above his head. His line 'I am most dreadfully attended' (II.2.268) was nonchalant, but shaded with the knowledge of the dark forces that surrounded him.

The play scene continued to prove difficult for a number of reasons. Hamlet was difficult to see and as the excitement rose towards the King's guilty start, a discordant, highpitched note indicative of overstrain crept into Gielgud's voice. Still the main fault was with the director rather than the actor. Claudius and Gertrude were placed well forward on thrones with their backs to the audience, while the players faced front, probably utilizing the penthouse to frame the action of 'The Murder of Gonzago', led up to by the Dumb Show. The scene was thus endowed with a covert and indirect peep-show quality, with the royal couple exchanging glances and whispers and turning their heads at intervals to register their reactions. The play-within-a-play was more easily discerned than in any other of the Gielgud revivals, since the point of view of the court audience was equivalent to that of the genuine spectators, but it was distracting to many reviewers not

to be able to adopt the same keenness of scrutiny of the King and Queen as Hamlet. One of the purposes of 'The Murder of Gonzago' which emerged clearly under Guthrie McClintic's direction was that the Queen's collaboration in the murder was being tested also. The Manchester Guardian (29.6.1939) dubbed the stage arrangement 'a palpable error', complaining that here it was impossible to tell if the Queen was an accessory before or after the fact of murder, and Audrey Williamson listed it as a primary dramatic miscalculation, nullifying the entire effect of this key turning point (Theatre of Two Decades, p.266). It is to be remembered that most of the English reviewers saw the production at the Lyceum before it went to Elsinore. On a projecting platform unrestricted by a proscenium arch, with the audience sitting on three sides of the action, the masking of the King and Queen would be diminished and it was no doubt Gielgud's intention to encourage all his actors to allow for a wider range of sight lines. The various angles of the spectators, dictated by the thrust stage, would make a less unilateral treatment feasible. Gielgud attained better results in the following prayer scene, where Claudius kneeled at the customary prie-dieu on the edge of the apron while Hamlet stole through the drapes behind. Richard Hanson, whose Danish holiday coinciding with the Elsinore début accounts for the appearance of his review in The Rochdale Observer (5.8.1939), supplied some vivid detail to a memorable incident:

Chiefly, we remember that scene played on the apron stage, where the King in a robe of royal crimson embroidered with gold coronets kneels at his prayer stool, his sins nakedly confessing. Hamlet enters through soft, billowing grey-silver curtains in his black velvet suit and stands pensively with sword unsheathed, watching his uncle.

It is notable that no mention is made of the business of Hamlet robbing the King of his sword. Had Gielgud therefore abandoned this favourite practice of his? Moreover, Claudius's dress does not suggest that he was on the point of retiring to his bed. The wind ensured the continual bellying of the curtains so that Hamlet's arrival was ghostly and unprecedented in contrast to his earlier shaking of the hangings (1936).

The confrontation with Gertrude in her closet retained all its sensational emotionalism with perhaps some increase in the variety of utterance that was used. Hamlet did not just berate his mother in an orgy of savage recrimination, although this was the note on which the scene began. His angry declamation was modulated with passages of whispered and murmured entreaty despite the predominance of the sarcastic, corrosive vein that had ripened with Gielgud's age. After he had stabbed through the arras at the spying Polonius, his cry of 'Is it the King?' was full of breathless expectancy and short-lived exaltation in believing he had discharged his duty. Laura Cowie's interpretation of the Queen was essentially the same performance she had given in 1934: dark haired, exotic and spirited. She was able to resist her son's attack even though she finally succumbed to it (See The Sphere, 15.7.1939).

The despatching of Hamlet to England followed on swiftly and it was at least likely that the theatrical coup Ivor Brown mentions of the Prince being enclosed by spies and Switzers occurred here (Observer, 2.7.1939). Under armed escort it was not surprising that Hamlet's acceptance of the course of events 'Come for England!' (IV.3.53) did not ring with much conviction. The meeting with Fortinbras and his army en route led to a quiet, reflective reading of the 'How all occasions' soliloquy.

'Go to their graves- like beds' (IV.4.62) was spoken with an appalled and quivering fascination. The two final words were stressed. Unaccountably, the graveyard scene failed to come off, missing both the requisite pathos and grimness. To one reviewer Gielgud suggested neither the intensity of feeling for the dead jester or the drowned Ophelia (Audrey Williamson, Theatre of Two Decades, p.267). To another, the clowns were to blame by affecting 'the inarticulate catarrhal habit of English music hall' (Listener, 13.7.1939). The quarrel with Laertes was used to express the development of Hamlet, thanks to a suggestion of Granville-Barker's. Barker extended the parallel between the two men by pointing out that Hamlet's fury with Laertes arose out of the resemblance between Laertes's verbose grief and his own reaction to the death of his father at the opening of the play. Thus this episode became a further indicator of the change in Hamlet. The light, inconsequential bantering with Osric provided an appropriately humorous coda though it could not compensate for this earlier lapse, and Hamlet's own death scene was rendered poignant by Horatio's lingering gaze into his dead friend's face and the careful folding of the lifeless hands across his breast.

The impression made by Gielgud's fourth Hamlet was qualified considerably by the unusual conditions of staging. Some of the vocal subtlety and atmospheric vividness was unquestionably sacrificed in the open courtyard of the palace under the afternoon light. Later, as the performance wore on and it became darker, artificial lighting was introduced, but this did not help the early scenes. Richard Hanson commented on the reduced carrying power of the actor's voices, which may not have always been able to reach the back rows of wooden benches that had been arranged in the quadrangle (Rochdale Observer, 5.8.1939), and the reviewer for The Listener (13.7.1939) argued that much of the light and shade of

Hamlet's speech did not carry whereas elsewhere the gradations of the verse were simply neglected in order to ensure that the words would be heard at all. The production was certainly uneven. Nevertheless, and putting many, small modifications aside, this was the same interpretation of the character that had been seen on countless indoor stages. For The Birmingham Post (30.6.1939) the complexities, the introspection, the intelligence, the sense of profound depth that contrasted with the shallow society in which Hamlet found himself were once more in evidence and, if Gielgud had not improved upon his earlier reading, then this was because he had left so little room for improvement. With the one criticism, that he lent perhaps too much emotional polish to some lines, this reviewer was content to repeat his earlier observations on the role. Hamlet's wit and intelligence in the rapid cut and thrust of conversation were the features that impressed themselves on the reviewer of The Birmingham Gazette (29.6.1939) who concluded that his madness was of genius instead of impotent irresolution. The same opinion was expressed that 'Gielgud's presentation differs little from that which he gave some years ago'.

The Manchester Guardian (29.6.1939), on the other hand, suggested that there was an overall toughening of fibre in Gielgud's latest Hamlet coupled to an increased technical command. The reviewer stated that there had been something weak and lackadaisical about the younger Hamlet that had impaired its beauty. Now Hamlet had acquired 'a logic in his anger' and 'a wildness in his calm' that showed him to be excelling in his recitative skill and musical apprehension of words. There was a new and exciting edge to Gielgud's unstinting treatment of Hamlet's morbidity especially. For Audrey Williamson, although she had much to say against the production, this was Gielgud's finest Hamlet because, along with the febrile brilliance and slender, regal beauty which it had always possessed, he had acquired a wider range of mood that encompassed the darker side of

the Prince's personality. Besides the sensitivity and sweetness of the former portrayal there were venomous flashes and bitter humour. It was, in particular, the mordant wit of John Barrymore that American critics had missed in Gielgud's last performance. The harder severity that came across in the acting removed the play further from the romantic conception of the tragedy as that of an over-thoughtful, over-sensitive young man paralysed by constitutional incapacity. Gielgud had never subscribed to this reading entirely, though his Hamlet had always been squarely within the romantic tradition as it was expressed in the performances of Irving and Forbes-Robertson, but now it was less easy to account for the protagonist's delay in terms of his refined sensibility. In many respects, he appeared supremely fitted for action: strong willed, peremptory, quick of decision and of volatile temperament yet impeded where Claudius's murder was concerned by his failure to cope with mighty, irreconcilable impulses. Ivor Brown declared that there were losses and gains in the new Hamlet. On the debit side, there was not so much of the generous youthful vitality that earned sympathy for Hamlet and enhanced the sense of originality of earlier productions. On the credit side, there was a deeper fund of passion, cruelty, cynicism and coarse dissoluteness that was no longer obscured by his fineness of spirit and speech. Brown wrote,

If you feel his work has a shade less magnanimity than it once possessed you must concede it more range and resource. The play itself gains in excitement by the earthy vigour of the prince, who seems not so much a moody creature hampered in his task by delicate sensibilities, as a man of strong conflicting passions whose irresolution depends not on lack of will but on the clash of powerful motives. (Observer, 2.7.1939).

Towards the end of the war a scheme was hatched for Gielgud again to go into management. The last time he had undertaken this task was in 1937 at the Queen's theatre where he had taken Shakespeare to the West End

and made him commercially viable at a time when the West End was dominated by vaudevilles and light entertainment. A season of plays was planned to be performed by a single company, including A Midsummer Night's Dream and Hamlet, to be directed by the university Professors Nevill Coghill and George Rylands, respectively. Hamlet was previewed at the Cambridge Arts Theatre before coming to London.

It was Rylands's decision to set the play in the period of Henry VII, antedating Gielgud's own preference as a director for more flamboyant periods closer to that of the play's composition. This recalled the power struggles and hierarchical organization of a society nearer to feudalism and evoked associations of baronial halls and solid, less elaborate architecture than the green and gold turrets, statued niches and tapering spires of the palace at Elsinore. Décor was rich but sombre, an impression that was heightened by subdued lighting. When revealed to its full extent, the set consisted of three stepped levels descending in height to the front of the stage. Shadowy portals stood one to each side and tapestries were hung behind. For certain scenes, such as the prayer scene, these could be drawn to screen off the inner stage area to provide a sense of seclusion. The walls of the set were designed to look like the bare stone slabs of masonry fortifications. Costumes were elegant, making use of swirling cloaks and hose, but they did not possess the originality or the flair of the wardrobe created by Motley. As Hamlet, Gielgud wore conventional black tights and a collarless over-jerkin belted at the waist and loose at the sleeves to show the white cuffs beneath. An embroidered border at the throat of the jerkin and a necklace were minor concessions to ornament in an outfit that, unlike his costume in 1936, placed little emphasis on decoration. To symbolize his madness the jerkin was unfastened, his white undershirt was allowed to flap loosely at his breast, one sleeve was crumpled and the other one was rolled up to his elbow where the gathering

of shirt dangled (Plate 9). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with whom he is depicted in the photograph, on the other hand, create an impression of fashionable ostentation, as do the King and Queen. In the first scene the King and Queen wore robes fringed by ermine with voluminous sleeves, jewels and heavy jewel-studded crowns. The austerity of Hamlet's appearance tended to complement the austerity of Gielgud's acting.

Rylands brought to the production a deep respect for the spoken text, given in an unusually full version, and a scholar's concern for precision and accuracy. One notices that the Ghost was equipped, not just with helmet and plume, but also with his marshal's truncheon that is often disregarded in modern productions in spite of Horatio's description:

A figure like your father,
Armed at point exactly, cap-a-pe,
Appears before them, and with solemn march
Goes slow and stately by them; thrice he walk'd
By their oppress'd and fear-surprised eyes,
Within his truncheon's length; (1.2.199).

However, he may not have devoted the same amount of attention to his visual tableau, as Gielgud's account of rehearsals indicates.

He was very strict over the text in both the plays he directed. I felt, though, that he did not watch the stage enough. He kept his eye on the book all the time and seemed to have little pictorial interest in the look of what was happening on the stage. (An Actor and His Time, pp.149,153)⁷



9. Hamlet and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Haymarket, 1944

Moreover, the gap between study and stage became manifest in the disagreements of the professional actors and their scholarly director.

Whilst Rylands's experience was not confined to working with student amateurs, he was inclined to be dismissive of the actor's problems with the motivation and psychology of their characters and kept referring them constantly back to the text. With the best will in the world on both sides, differences of outlook and approach interfered with the dramatic outcome.

The first major problem arose when Gielgud was required to sit in a chair facing out towards the audience in I.2. The King and Queen sat together on a pair of thrones on the highest of three levels while Hamlet's chair was below on the next, to the right of his uncle. Courtiers stood around the perimeter of the stage and gathered in clusters at the front near to two more chairs to the left and right, most probably intended for the Norwegian ambassadors. This meant that when Hamlet was addressed he could not look at Claudius directly to vent his animosity and he had to wait until the King and Queen came off their thrones and down to him before there could be any direct face to face contact between them. His initial aside was projected straight out towards the auditorium. Thus realism was dispensed with immediately in favour of a broad and stylized treatment that was far removed from the business like council table and Hamlet's late attendance at the meeting that had been developed in 1939.

Lighting played an important part in making the entrance of the Ghost portentous. Hamlet's acknowledgement of the spectre was not unmingled with

genuine terror. Even so, his reactions weren't as nervously overwrought as they had been. The tenderness and pity that he had formerly shown towards his father's spirit was tempered with the rage and disgust with which he greeted the exposure of Claudius's crime. The antic disposition was, as it always had been in Gielgud's performance, a blatant sham to baffle and bewilder his enemies and disguise his true motives. Beneath the mask that Hamlet doffed at will was an eminently sane individual. Sometimes acting with moody rashness, his feeling outbursts never denoted mental imbalance, as Desmond McCarthy discerned. 'What Mr. Gielgud plays down is Hamlet's mask of madness. He excels in interpreting his impetuous but sane emotion' (New Statesman and Nation, 21.10.1944). The apostrophe to mankind which ends on 'the quintessence of dust' (II.2.307) was beautifully coherent and contributed a highlight of the performance. Each soliloquy fulfilled a phase of the action as a logical extension of the play's unfolding. Gielgud's exposition was lucid and unforced, purged of any traces of exhibitionism. Horace Horsnell was struck by how the actor was sunk in the part and the part was more deeply embedded in the play than of old (Tatler, 8.11.1944). 'Selectiveness is the only thing that I think one learns as one gets older, both in friends and behaviour and acting and directing. One tries always to do less rather than more' Gielgud had said to Michael Elliott, and this was demonstrated in his pared-down, unembellished presentation of Hamlet's monologues.⁸ 'To be or not to be' had a spontaneous freshness that was ecstatic and at the same time completely natural. In alliance with Peggy Ashcroft's Ophelia, who wore a simple white dress in her mad scenes and played with real but inconsequential flowers, Hamlet's repeated advice to her to enter a nunnery showed a clear transition from gentle solicitation to sneering contempt. At first, her well-being was uppermost in his mind and the nunnery was a place of retreat, but as her betrayal became increasingly plain to him it soon became a derisive euphemism. The tart viciousness with which Hamlet spoke contradicted

Irving's postulate that he was really in love with her.

The play scene seems to have misfired though it is difficult to discover from reviews exactly why this was. Both the acting and staging seem to have been in some measure at fault. Hamlet was physically active at this point, making leaps and bounds across the stage that may have been distracting. His triumph over catching the King's conscience was celebrated with brisk exuberant movements. Audrey Williamson missed the irony and the menace over this mid-section of the production which was captured elsewhere. Extras were scarce owing to war time conditions and the staid and elderly courtiers who attended 'The Murder of Gonzago's' royal premiere did not provide the right background of wicked licentiousness where the Prince's stinging barbs could strike home (Theatre of Two Decades, p.267). The King's prayers were spoken before a crucifix on a table comprising a small altar instead of a prie-dieu; a photograph shows Hamlet emerging from the curtains behind with rapier already drawn (Theatre World, September 1944). The altar rather awkwardly remains on stage during the subsequent meeting in Gertrude's closet, where the sight of the dull, if not consciously evil, fading coquette being exposed by her remorseless, indignant son made a moving spectacle. Any Freudian overtones were subdued in Gielgud's firm, straightforward denunciation. The final section of the play, after Hamlet's fight with the pirates, had a poise and spiritual calm that renewed the emphasis on the qualities of the Sweet Prince. The figure of the sullen, callous revenger was transfigured in Gielgud's radiation of charm, generosity and noble bearing. There was a poignant beauty about his death that could not altogether be disturbed by the sketchy handling of the duel and the despatching of the King.

The most significant factor about the 1944 Hamlet was his maturity. Gielgud was forty years old - the same age as Irving when he first played the part at the Lyceum. His performance was no longer so fresh and young as it had been. The play was not so bright and vivid. The production was rather dull visually - especially in comparison to Gielgud's own productions, which were always visually exciting. The spoken word, on the other hand, was assiduously treated and Rylands, who spent so much time recording Shakespeare, took particular care to hear that the voices were well orchestrated.

Desmond MacCarthy singled out 'What a piece of work is a man' to exemplify Gielgud's abilities as 'a subtle elocutionist' though he admired all of the seven soliloquies. 'To be or not to be' had a spontaneous freshness that was completely natural and Gielgud skilfully 'avoided quotations'. Only in 'Alas poor Yorick' and 'Angels and ministers of grace' did Gielgud fall short. MacCarthy thought that the address to the Ghost should have been given on a sustained note of 'solemn magniloquence untouched by fear'. The production excelled in its appeal to the ear, but 'failed to delight the eye'.

With the exception of Ophelia's white dress and Hamlet's conventional black tights, the costumes are heavy, gaudy trappings from an old-fashioned theatrical wardrobe; and the Elsinore setting is hardly more stimulating to the imagination than a dismal, mid-Victorian Gothic hydro. (Necessary economy no doubt, but a pity.)
(New Statesman and Nation, 21 10.1944)

MacCarthy also blamed Gielgud for his 'too self-conscious elegance of movement'. His performance was physically restless; Hamlet made agile leaps and bounds across the stage and 'one tires of too much elegant rapidity'. In dress, as well, he could have looked more slovenly and disordered in Act II - nearer to Ophelia's description of him. Yet it is

very rare indeed for Hamlet to appear on stage,

with his doublet all unbrac'd,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungart'ed and down-gyved to his ankle;
Pale as his shirt, (II.1.78)

Gielgud was simply following his usual practice of restricting the outward signs of Hamlet's madness to a basic minimum.

Besides Hamlet being older, Gielgud made him harder, less vulnerable, more of the cynic and the snarling, disillusioned outcast. His rages were more overwhelmingly bitter; he was less tender towards Ophelia, less loving towards his mother and the blood-lust rested more easily in a temperament that had a natural mean streak. Signs of this had already begun to appear in 1939 at the outset of the war and, now that the war was almost over, we can see how this mood had darkened and hardened into a settled austerity that brought his interpretation into alignment with the spirit of the times. The shift of emphasis in his interpretation was allied to a change of technique, using greater economy, greater objectivity, a smaller stress on the formal beauty of the verse, less playing for sympathy. The change was not readily accepted by everybody and there were those who looked back on Gielgud's earlier performances with nostalgia when Hamlet was warmer, more open and had a more facile emotional appeal.

The Manchester Guardian (16.10.1944) named textual fidelity as the chief merit of Gielgud's performance. Neither the production nor Hamlet had been falsely beautified. The settings were 'modestly baronial'. Gielgud's acting was said to have gained in clarity. His meditations were deeper and yet they possessed all 'the old music'. However, the production overall did not live up to the reviewer's hopes:

It lacks the lightning flash: it is the truth of Hamlet but not the tempest or the terror.

Horace Horsnell described this Hamlet as 'a classical performance'. Gielgud's style had mellowed and he had sunk the part fuller in the play than he had ever done before. There was a self-effacing quality about the playing that was exemplified by the treatment of the soliloquies. They were beautifully spoken but not underscored and the result was that 'they fulfil and don't merely punctuate phases of the action'. Yet the story, in spite of the almost full text which helped to clarify motives and supply illuminating detail that served to fill out the secondary characters, was 'possibly over-deliberate at times' (Tatler, 8.11.1944). Audrey Williamson wrote:

When Gielgud revived the play at the Haymarket his performance had lost some of its former qualities. The mentality was less youthful and irresolute; there was increased dignity and strength, less spontaneity, grief and nervous impulse. The salient characteristic of this Prince was not sorrow but anger; a bitter, pent-up anger and disgust that cut across the stage like keen-edged steel. The Ghost scene, indeed the whole performance, was less moving than before, less supercharged with pity and highly-strung emotion. (Theatre of Two Decades, p.267)

These comments are interesting because they show Gielgud to be in conflict, not with an interpretative tradition established by another actor as in the case of Richard II, but with the tradition he had established in the earlier part of his own career. The younger the actor, the more likely the application of Hamlet's observation to Rosencrantz on 'the little eyases':

will they not say afterwards if they should
 grow themselves to common players - as it is
 most like if their means are no better -
 their writers do them wrong to make them
 exclaim against their own succession?
 (II.2.344)

The earlier Hamlets had been, in a sense, exclaiming against their own succession.

From the point of view of this study the direction that Gielgud's development of the role had taken was, in many ways, an implicit rejection of what he had once set out to do. In fifteen years the shape of the role had altered, if not beyond recognition, then at least in a way that suggested he was changing his own style as an artist. The reviewers that had accepted his Hamlet in 1930, 1934 and 1936 found Hamlet, as he was being played in 1944, harsh and astringent and, for all its increased technical accomplishment, unable to compensate for the seeming-spontaneous, natural qualities of the earlier ones. Yet, for a critic like James Agate, who had always qualified his praise of Gielgud's Hamlet with the memory of Irving's, he was playing better now than previously. Contrary to Audrey Williamson's opinion, Agate found evidence of an 'Irvingesque pathos', and a moody asperity in the speeches after III.2. Agate was, of course, predisposed to show his approval because he could never accept that the maturity of outlook revealed in Hamlet's words was compatible with a youthful presence:

The too young Hamlet takes one's thoughts
 off this play in a way the concert hall's
 infant prodigy takes them off the music...
 Mr. Gielgud is now completely and authorita-
 tively master of this tremendous part.

He is we feel this generation's rightful
 tenant of this 'monstrous Gothic castle of a poem.'
 He has acquired an almost Irvingesque quality of
 pathos and in the passages after the play scene
 an incisiveness, a raillery, a mordancy worthy of
 the old man. (Sunday Times, 22.10.1944).

Spectators of George Rylands's production saw the last performance of Hamlet that Gielgud was ever to give in this country. A year later he toured the Far East under the auspices of the E.N.S.A., bringing his own production to the allied troops, but that takes us beyond the scope of the present study. This was, in fact, the last time he ever performed the part in the theatre. His theatrical involvement with the play, however, did not end here. In 1964 he flew to Toronto to direct Richard Burton as Hamlet in a production that made its début in Boston at the Shubert Theatre and was later taken to New York. It is not my intention to offer a detailed account of a production that is already well documented, but I should like to make a few observations on the style of the performance and the directorial concept which lay behind it in order to throw some light on the changing ethos of the play as it is illustrated by Gielgud's career.⁹

The mode of presentation represented a fundamental departure from Gielgud's earlier productions in that the décor was not intended to evoke any particular historical period. In so far as the clothes worn by the actors were modern, it could be said that they stimulated contemporary associations. As he said himself,

Each Hamlet is a period piece in line with the times;
 and now that kings, queens and presidents dress like
 the people and move among them, a plain-clothes Hamlet
 is called for. (Sunday Times, 12.4.1964)

But in fact the contemporary atmosphere that he created for the play was only incidental to his main concern, which was to capture the mood of a rehearsal for a production in period dress before the costumes and scenic accessories were introduced. He wanted, in other words, to reduce a production to its barest essentials in order to communicate the immediacy of the spoken word and the primacy of the actor. Great stress was laid upon the performers choosing clothes for themselves that enabled them to feel in touch with the character that they were playing. They were not simply to try to create an external likeness, but to find outfits that promoted their imaginative engagement with their part. Thus Rosencrantz wore a pale-blue tweed jacket with olive-brown trousers, an off-white shirt and a bright necktie while Guildenstern was dressed in light-blue slacks and brown sports jacket. Hamlet wore a black V-necked jumper, black slacks and slip-on shoes. One can see how, even though personal choice was permitted, a broad area of thematic contrast was still retained. Hamlet's two university friends were brighter, sharper dressers than he was. Overall coordination was still preserved and, in the director's concern with small details, his careful attention to each actor's appearance was plain. Gielgud wanted the King to wear a wrist watch because of the important position he held in the world of affairs. The associations of the wrist watch with appointments, schedules and time keeping were felt to be in sympathy with the character. Hamlet, on the other hand, wore no watch. Ophelia placed a flower in Laertes's buttonhole as he left for France, which anticipated her return to nature in the mad scene. Some period props were used to avoid discrepancies with the text such as rapiers for the duel, an ornate goblet for the poisoned wine and a florid, red plumed hat for Osric. Yet these were confined to the few essential items that might be present in the rehearsal studio prior to a dress rehearsal. The rest were improvised from basic studio furniture. The arras where Polonius was stabbed was a coat rack with the coats hanging

from it on hooks. The grave of Ophelia was a table turned over onto its side. These pieces of furniture were moved into place by supernumeraries dressed in black (the curtain did not fall during the play) who contributed a sense of ritual to the proceedings. It was also their responsibility to erect a folding screen resembling a miniature castle that was used as a background to 'The Murder of Gonzago'. They were the only actors who wore straightforward costumes. Wearing masks and bright, parti-coloured robes, they looked like animated playing cards.

The set was designed to present the appearance of an empty theatre before the scenery had been added. A huge pair of sliding, loading bay doors dominated the stage from their central position in the rear wall and were only opened for the entry of the players, Fortinbras, Hamlet's funeral procession and the Ghost. The latter was represented by a gigantic black shadow and spoke with the voice of Gielgud in hoarse, whispered tones produced electronically. It was a prerecorded tape. In front of these doors was a platform of rough wood, raised about four foot from the stage level and angled to the auditorium so that it jutted out towards the right. A crooked stairway led down towards it from this side and treads connected it with the main stage in three directions.¹⁰

Critics responded equivocally to the concept of a rehearsal run-through production. Gordon Rogoff attributed the failure of Burton's performance to move to the barrenness of the costumes and the scenic design, which failed to provide adequate definition for the witty, humorous, vocally skillful and physically expressive Hamlet that it contained. For all his bubbling vitality and technical artistry, Burton remained detached and bloodless, thanks to the bleak and undistinguished décor and the absence of support

from the other members of the cast (except Polonius, the King, and the first gravedigger). Quoting the director's programme note to the effect that the extraneous trappings had been removed to concentrate on the poetry and the play, Rogoff countered that the sombre monochrome effect produced by avoiding the use of a conventional wardrobe and mise-en-scene could be just as distracting as the over-use of these elements. The production was less like a final run-through than it was an early rehearsal in which the actors speak their lines and go through their movements without really having identified with the parts they are playing (Plays and Players, June 1964). Newsweek (20.4.1964) carried an article of similar tenor, suggesting that the direction failed to come to grips with the problems of the play. While the reviewer was prepared to allow that the rehearsal format skirted distractions and banalities, he declared that it had no positive interpretative value. The production disclosed that the director had exercised little influence over the outcome, neither moulding the rhythm nor freeing the play. Gielgud seemed to have done nothing to weld his cast into an efficient playing ensemble and Burton's Hamlet was allowed to steer his own course. An entirely opposite view was put forward by Louis Chapin in The Christian Science Monitor (11.4.1964), where Gielgud was credited with having found a perfect technical shape for the performance, propelling it forward with sureness and vigor. The rehearsal clothes more than made up for their lack of visual interest by enhancing the poetry. Particularly striking were the scenes on the ramparts with the Ghost, where the height of the shadowy representation dwarfed the real actors and comprised an awe-inspiring spectacle matched by the sight of the soldiers carrying Hamlet's body out through the central doors, as high as they could reach. These moments were exceptional pictures in an entertainment devised essentially to appeal to the ear rather than the

eye. Some lack of commitment in the cast could not detract from the basic soundness of the swelling orchestration. Thomas Archer was also appreciative of a very tense, fast Hamlet which was notable for its clarity and balance and the primacy which it gave to the text. The poetic imagery of the play stood out against the spare, economical presentation style (Montreal Gazette, 2.3.1964).

The obvious question arising out of a commentary which deals with six distinct productions of Hamlet connected with one man is how they are all related. Can any broad conclusions be drawn about Gielgud's contribution to the stage history of Hamlet that will stand up over all the changing circumstances underlying the productions he has been involved with? As a preliminary to answering this question it will be useful to have some means of broadly classifying his work and I therefore propose to adopt a distinction between the first three productions of 1930, 1934, and 1936 and the fourth and fifth productions of 1939 and 1944: the pre-war and the war Hamlets. The 1964 production stands apart in time and technically from the five earlier versions because it is the one occasion when Gielgud directed the play without acting the main role himself.

Now this way of dividing the Gielgud Hamlets is not historically exact since the 1939 production occurred just before the outbreak of war, but it is very helpful in identifying the mood and style of the performances. Gielgud's youth in the pre-war Hamlets coloured his whole interpretation and made the play seem fresh and unusual. In the war Hamlets his age seemed a thing of less importance (although it may have made him harder and more austere in the role) and the overall mood of the play had darkened. The tonal contrasts of the productions were underlined by a conflict of fashion, for Gielgud, having successfully made Hamlet younger than he traditionally appeared to be on the stage and opened up the play

in a new way, was having to assert the claim of his maturity to the role. We saw how reviewers like Audrey Williamson, who had accepted his pre-war Hamlets, found it difficult to reconcile themselves to the war Hamlets and how James Agate, who had withheld his full approval from Gielgud's earlier performances, was eventually convinced by the 1944 production. Hamlet was a part for a mature actor, Agate maintained. Here we have a good example of the tantalizing vagaries of theatrical tradition and their complex, loosely-related connection with the text. For there is, of course, no way of settling once and for all at what age exactly Hamlet should be played by appealing directly to Shakespeare's text and yet the text can be greatly influenced in performance by a circumstantial detail. Gielgud never insisted in his pre-war period on Hamlet's youth, but there were certain unavoidable consequences of his identity as a young man which were conspicuous in the part and which coincided with the interest in the nineteen-thirties in youth per se. This was partly an escapist idealization produced as a reaction to the demoralizing effect of the First World War and one of the worst periods of economic hardship this century has ever known, and partly a reflection of the neuroses, apathy, cynicism and manic-gaiety that were the fashion of the time and became fastened, rather guiltily, on the young. Interestingly enough, Hamlet seems to have a peculiar focussing effect on social trends of this kind, which works quite independently of modern dress or the director's selection of relevant themes. It is not necessary to attire the cast in jack-boots and nazi uniforms as in Orson Welles's production of Julius Caesar before the topicality of the play leaps out at us. The topical spirit of Hamlet is something that must have impressed itself on Elizabethan audiences through the references to the war of the theatres, fashions in clothing, duelling etiquette, social upstarts, preparations for invasion, the recent theatrical success of Julius Caesar

and the language of sophisticated legal disputation. Whilst the allusions have become dated, productions continue to demonstrate the spirit of contemporaneity that the play is steeped in. David Warner's Hamlet in the sixties exerted a similar influence, tapping the mood of student unrest and the 'drop-out' ideology of that time. Still, it is easy to exaggerate the significance of Hamlet's age and forget that it has been greatly underlined by modern social trends. When Shakespeare fixed Hamlet's age as thirty in the graveyard scene, where he wishes to introduce some temporal perspective and meditative repose in a plot that has bristled with incidents and spontaneous passions and intrigues, the play is already three quarters over and his failure to be explicit earlier restores some perspective to a matter that has appeared more important than it ought to on the stage. I would suggest that Gielgud's developments in technique and not his age were what represented the real advance in his playing in 1944. His performance may not have been so visually comely nor so lyrical, but then he was harder, more incisive and vehement.

The productions of the war Hamlets, on the other hand, probably did not maintain the high standards set by the previous ones. Gielgud's Elsinore production made effective use of the platform stage to represent the entry of the Ghost and the opening court scene where the King and his councillors were seated behind a wide table with the bodyguard of Switzers, with pikes, standing further back. But it did not express the delicate co-ordination of perspectives in the play scene, sacrificing the reactions of Claudius and Gertrude, who sat in thrones near to the audience but turned away from them, to the action of the play-within-a-play. Natural lighting and weather conditions interfered with the atmosphere, particularly in the earlier Ghost scenes and the open-air acoustics of the courtyard limited the range and the subtler nuances of speech.

George Rylands's production was accurately spoken and was assiduously attentive to detail such as the Ghost's truncheon, but it was rather gloomily lit and lacked a sense of the gorgeous opulence and decadence of the Danish court which Guthrie McClintic and Gielgud, in his 1934 production, had captured so convincingly with their brighter use of colour and pictorial flair. This is something that post-war productions of *Hamlet* seem rather to have neglected in their rejection of painterly techniques and their increasing emphasis on sculptural severity; *Hamlet* is somewhat in danger of being absorbed into designer's visions of *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. There is a sense of elemental harshness in *Hamlet* evoked by Horatio's bleak crag 'That beetles o'er his base into the sea' (I.4.71), the naked steel of swords and other weapons (Hamlet's 'bare bodkin' (III.1.76)) and the dust and bleached bones of the graveyard scene, but there is also an impression of royal pageantry, of sensual cloyment, of the painted cheek of the harlot and the picturesque death of Ophelia: the sense of beauty and destructive evil are inexplicably combined.

Gielgud's 1934 production, with its décor by Motley, employed touches of phosphorous in the costumes to heighten the colours of silver, red and gold against black, blue and purple, jewelry, coats-of-arms and billowing curtains to establish bold and sweeping outlines, reminding us of the visual richness of *Hamlet* and the lyrical strain of the verse that later productions have ignored. Gielgud showed here that the mood of tragedy is just as compatible with the free use of the artist's palette as is that of comedy. His 1934 *Hamlet* is actually comparable with his later production of *Much Ado About Nothing* where, in fact, the brightness and ingenuity of the décor seem less integrally related to the atmosphere of the play, accentuating one aspect of it only.

The pre-war Hamlets display different possibilities of combining functional stylized elements with stylistic elegance and visual flair. The various alternatives explored by Gielgud and McClintic both stem from the simple, rudimentary stylization employed by Harcourt Williams in 1930, where the prayer and the closet scenes were joined by splitting the stage down the middle and introducing a bed into the Queen's chamber. Hamlet's movement between the King and Queen on the divided stage thus symbolized a basic dialectic of the play. Gielgud directed these scenes in the same way. In 1934 the King stripped himself of sword and crown and knelt at a prie-dieu, picked out in a single beam of light, while the bed was suggested by the arrangement of curtains like the canopy around a four-poster. The spotlight picked up Hamlet and followed him across the stage. This led to Hamlet and the Queen wrestling together on the sheets in 1936, where McClintic's production dispensed with the stage division to introduce a complete gold canopied bed, with grey and orange curtains, into the middle of the scene. It was McClintic's production, on the other hand, which was closest to Harcourt Williams's in the play scene where the King and Queen were set on a higher level at the back of the stage, facing the audience, looking down on the players. Gielgud's production set the King and Queen on one side of the stage and the players on the other, suggesting a resemblance between Claudius and the Player King, both isolated on rostrums. This tended to focus attention squarely upon Claudius, particularly when he blundered down the steps of the rostrum straight into the middle of the stage when his nerve finally broke, but it played down the importance of the Queen. McClintic's arrangement favoured the King and Queen equally, showing that the play was meant as a test and a rebuke for her also. In all three productions Hamlet's restless movements provided Gielgud with a means of reflecting the complex functions he had to sustain beyond that of a passive spectator. Hamlet was an outspoken critic of the performance, a choric commentator, an inquisitor and almost an actor as well, as Gielgud demon-

strated in 1934 by coming right across the stage and snatching the Player King's mask to point it at his Uncle. In 1930 and 1936 he crossed behind the thrones to get into positions that would allow him to direct strategic lines insinuatingly into the ears of the guilty parties as Claudius had originally poured the poison into his victim's ear.

All the Kings in the pre-war Hamlets were completely routed in the play scene. Donald Wolfit's bibulous, Van-Dyck-bearded Claudius ran from the stage terrified by a waking nightmare. Frank Vosper's sensuous and slightly corpulent King tottered down from his pedestal and blundered into the middle of the play. Malcolm Keen's nervous, opulent monarch, in white lace collar and cuffs, reacted to Hamlet's blows upon a parchment and then tried to escape down a staircase only to find that his way was blocked. But the Kings generally that have played alongside Gielgud's Hamlets, apart from this one public lapse, have been played on a scale that has supported their grandeur, outward composure and inner psychological complexity. The association with drink need not necessarily be taken as a sign of conventional villainy, though the gin bottle is never far away from the villain in Victorian melodrama. Drinking might be an external sign of a stricken conscience. The 1939 production, indeed, was especially concerned to extend the ambiguous aura surrounding Claudius by casting Jack Hawkins as the Ghost as well and underlining the resemblance by having the Ghost disappear behind the curtains of the penthouse, which would open moments later to reveal Claudius on his throne.

Another general point which this commentary has highlighted is that the Queen justified Claudius's sexual attraction and indicated Hamlet's reluctance to accept the full implications of her pride and womanhood. She was far from being decrepit. She was capable of sustaining emotional intensity despite the fact that her feelings for Hamlet's father had ceased to be her

dominating passion when the play opened. This idea was promoted in 1930 by Martita Hunt's energetic performance and the similarity of attire between her and Ophelia - each actress wearing a butterfly collar and dress of low neckline. Laura Cowie, in 1934, accentuated Gertrude's seductive sophistication with an off-the-shoulder dress, heavy lipstick, a jet black coiffure and a necklace around her bare throat. The pageantry of her introduction alongside the King on a stepped rostrum, framed by heraldic hangings and four maids-in-waiting, balanced the fiery intimacy of the closet scene where the suggestion of the bed curtains indicated her readiness to turn 'the royal bed of Denmark' into 'A couch for luxury and damned incest' (I.5.82). Lilian Gish, equally sophisticated, with a painted beauty spot on her chin and tight, Caroline curls, fought physically with Hamlet in the closet scene and Gielgud, rejecting the strong Oedipal emphasis of Barrymore's interpretation, nevertheless pointed the tenderness of the relationship between mother and son by kissing Gertrude's bare shoulder and inflecting Hamlet's final word plaintively: 'Good night, mother' (III.4.217). The appearance of Laura Cowie in the role of the Queen again in 1939 and the similar design of Motley's costumes to those of the 1934 production suggest that this trend continued into the war Hamlets, although, with an older Hamlet, the filial relationship was less important than the battle of wits with the King.

The essential difference between Gielgud's 1934 production and the McClintic production of 1936 was in the way in which they chose to combine formalism and realism. We saw in the comparison of the two graveyard scenes that McClintic and his designer Jo Mielziner made elaborate modifications to their basic set, whereas the Motley décor for the 1934 production was more ostentatiously formalised. Gielgud's approach was altogether more impressionistic, uniting vague symbolic suggestiveness with stylish decoration, and his achievement was that he showed how settings

could be simplified and unintrusive and, at the same time, inventive and imaginatively eloquent. The production was perhaps rather uneconomical in its excessive use of stairs and platforms to explore different playing levels, switched by revolving the stage, but it was never obscure or dull. It avoided the pitfall of over-explicitness that McClintic's production occasionally fell into and ensured a smooth delivery of the spoken word and a pictorial accompaniment that harmonized with its richness.

The 'rehearsal clothes' concept of the 1964 production gains in clarity when it is seen against this background of opulent, elaborately illustrative Hamlet productions in the nineteen-thirties. Designers throughout the nineteen-thirties and the nineteen-forties had been exercising their ingenuity in devising formal settings and rich décor which would make the plays of Shakespeare visually interesting without detracting from the verbal imagery. But the very word 'imagery', with its connotations of seeing, hints at the way they approached their task from the point of view of trying to create pictures that would match the verse. Laurence Olivier's film of Hamlet represents a cinematic equivalent of this when, during the Queen's account of Ophelia's death, the camera turns its attention from the Queen and we actually see Ophelia, as in the Millais painting, floating in the pool adorned with garlands of weeds. The Queen's speech is compellingly visual, but by the nineteen-sixties it was becoming increasingly apparent to directors that the stimulus of the spoken word is fundamentally different from spatial painting and that the basic approach of pictorial analogy, even when it was simplified and suggestive rather than complex and literal, was cramping the poetry. Moreover, with the post-war growth of the media generally, there was an impulse not only to be able to understand and distinguish the awesome complexity of information technology, but to establish the integrity of theatre as a medium of artistic communication - something which would resist disintegration from radio, cinema, television,

tape and record. At its best the illustrative approach provided a sort of running commentary on the text that was always slightly independent of what was being heard and at its worst it was distractingly pretty, enjoyed in the way one enjoys a picture on a chocolate box lid, without any reference to the chocolates inside. This led to a concern to experiment with alternative modes of limited visual statement, purporting to offer the minimum of assistance to the imagination, and thereby rediscover the primacy of language. In comedy the illustrative style of approach proved harder to dislodge and one can see its continuation in a subdued form today in a fantastically stylized Merchant of Venice or a leaf-shaded, autumnal Love's Labour's Lost, with hanging boughs and log seats, but in tragedy especially directors began to turn more and more to simple, three-dimensional, permanent settings and rudimentary décor of a strictly functional kind. The designer was still just as important a member of the production team, but he was now being directed to think more in terms of creating environments for actors than in providing attractive pictures for audiences to look at, though he was expected to interpret the mood and provide a visual harmony for the production as well.

Just as Gielgud's performances of his war Hamlets were to some extent a reaction against his earlier, more romantic performances, his 1964 production represented a break with his earlier production methods and a response to the new trends that were filtering into the theatre at that time. The point to be brought out is that Gielgud was using his influence as a director to break the deadlock of his own association with the Hamlet tradition of the nineteen-thirties and forties whilst playing an innovative role himself in the contemporary movement.

He was not trying to get rid of décor as such, for the costumes, lighting and appearance of the set had as much attention devoted to them as they would have received in a conventional period production and, indeed, the problems that arose in the final choice of costumes for the actors in rehearsals rather indicated a greater emphasis than usual on one aspect of décor. However, the aim was to find a mode of presentation that would offer the simplest, most rudimentary kind of statement on the play, that could be justified in terms of its basic utility and a visual austerity that counterpointed the imaginative framework of the verse. The intention to capture a rehearsal ambience in the context of a fully-fledged, finalised production was a way of emphasizing the technical shape of a performance underlying the series of scenic pictures that conventionally focussed an audience's attention. But Gielgud was not, therefore, disregarding his audience's point of view in making the freedom of the actors - and Burton, in particular, was averse to wearing period costume - the foundation of his concept of presentation; he was experimenting with a way of getting the spectator to adjust his perspective in order to look at the play from a position approximating to that of the actor taking part.

When Hamlet stabbed Polonius through a coat-rack instead of a proper arras or was confronted by a Ghost who was a disembodied voice represented only by a huge indefinite shadow, we can see how the production was contrived to avoid any specific detail that would predetermine poetic suggestion. The associative significance of objects was reduced to the point where they approached imaginative neutrality and it was the spoken word and the conviction of the actors' performances that sustained a type of dramatic illusion against a background that was non-committal in all but the most pragmatic, instrumental sense. Thus there were two chief means that Gielgud's latest Hamlet production exploited which defined his relationship as a director to the movements of the theatre in the 'sixties and provided

a qualification to his earlier illustrative style. In the first place, the distrust of dramatic illusion created by ordinary décor, coming to be seen as independent of the play itself, helped to rewrite the designer's contract and generated many attempts to limit this illusion to what was really necessary. In the second place, the choice of a rehearsal format for the production focussed on actors in their normal working environment, suggesting that the practical techniques they used were something meaningful in terms of the finished impression of the play. At a time when basic questions of communication in the theatre were being tackled in a newly pragmatic way through experimental work with improvisation and the use of rehearsals as research laboratories, actors were being encouraged to explore the possibilities of how they used their voices and bodies, how the bare stage could be made to contribute to the dramatic experience; Gielgud was transforming the production medium into the basis of an expressive interpretation.

1. Except where otherwise indicated, information on the productions discussed in this chapter is principally based on the following sources:

OLD VIC, 1930

Harcourt Williams, Four Years at the Old Vic
 Illustrations, The Morning Post (30.4.1930)
 Rosamund Gilder, John Gielgud's Hamlet: A Record of Performance with the Hamlet Tradition by John Gielgud
 'Sir John Gielgud in Two Conversations with Martin Jenkins',
 Typescript

NEW, 1934

Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces
 Audrey Williamson, The Theatre of Two Decades
 John Gielgud interview, The Star (15.11.1934)
 Illustrations, The Morning Post (15.11.1934)
 Illustrations, Theatre World (January, 1935)

EMPIRE, 1936

Rosamund Gilder, John Gielgud's Hamlet: A Record of Performance with the Hamlet Tradition by John Gielgud
 Guthrie McClintic, promptbook
 'Sir John Gielgud in Two Conversations with Martin Jenkins',
 Typescript.

LYCEUM/ELSINORE, 1939

John Gielgud interview, Observer (25.6.1939)
 John Gielgud, 'A Note on The Present Production', Lyceum Souvenir Programme
 John Gielgud, 'Hamlet at Kronborg', Elsinore Programme

HAYMARKET, 1944

John Gielgud, An Actor and His Time
 Illustrations, Theatre World (September, 1944)
 Cambridge Arts Theatre Programme
 Haymarket Programme

SHUBERT THEATRE, 1964

Richard L. Sterne, John Gielgud directs Richard Burton in Hamlet: a Journal of Rehearsals
 William Redfield, Letters from an Actor
 John Gielgud interview, Sunday Times (12.4.1964)
Hamlet, Columbia U.S.A., recording

2. 'Sir John Gielgud in Two Conversations with Martin Jenkins',
 Typescript, 1975.

3. Rosamund Gilder, John Gielgud's Hamlet: A Record of Performance with the Hamlet Tradition by John Gielgud, Hamlet, promptbook, New York Public Library, NCP. 0643196.
4. See Shaw's review of Forbes-Robertson's production of Hamlet in The Saturday Review (1897) reprinted in Shaw on Shakespeare, edited by Edwin Wilson.
5. See 2.
6. Barrymore made his début in the role at the Sam H. Harris Theatre, New York, in 1922. He subsequently set the Broadway record of 101 consecutive performances. When Gielgud, in the present production, broke this record with 155 performances comparison with Barrymore was made inevitable.
7. See A. C. Sprague's Shakespeare and The Actors for a discussion of the place of the Ghost's truncheon in stage tradition. 'Hamlet Tomorrow or Next Thursday - But Just Not Tonight!' John Gielgud talks to John Miller, An Actor and His Time, A B.B.C. Radio Series produced by John Powell. John Gielgud, An Actor and His Time, p.81.
8. 'Style in Acting: Sir John Gielgud talks to Michael Elliott' Typescript, 1969.
9. A film and a gramophone recording were made of the production (Columbia U.S.A., DOS 702, Hamlet, Warners, 1964). See also Richard L. Sterne, John Gielgud directs Richard Burton in Hamlet: a Journal of Rehearsals, and William Redfield, Letters from An Actor.
10. Ground plans of the set may be found in Richard Sterne's John Gielgud directs Richard Burton in Hamlet: a Journal of Rehearsals.