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Replicas of Elizabethan playhouses, as well as theatres inspired by their architecture and especially by the Globe, are continuously mushrooming throughout the world. Numerous Globe-type theatres can be found in the US, Japan and since the 1990s in Europe. The latter are located in Prague and Neuss, and a Globe theatre is planned to open in Berlin. The mission statement of most of these theatres, and indeed the justification for their very existence, usually stresses that the purpose of these buildings is to enable us to experience Shakespeare and his contemporary playwrights in an ›authentic‹ environment, similar to the original theatres the plays were written for and performed at. It is taken for granted that Globe replicas imbue performances with authenticity. The architectural form of the theatres and nostalgia attached to it are hardly responsible for the content of theatrical productions, however, which employ authentic practices in varying degrees. As London's Globe has shown, such a space can lend itself successfully to inauthentic productions; indeed, productions that strive for ›authenticity‹ are not necessarily superior. However, what is the reason for, and dare I say obsession with, Elizabethan authenticity?

Shakespeare was voted »Man of the Millennium« by the British public, is Britain's foremost cultural export, and some would argue the Bard virtually epitomises British culture. However, this is not necessarily to say that the British have a stronger affinity to Shakespeare than other cultures. Shakespeare's undisputed status as Europe's most popular writer was confirmed in 1984, when five prestigious European newspapers (*Lire, El Pais, La Stampa, Die Zeit* and *The Times*) invited their readers to take part in a poll to establish the most important European writer. Participants were not allowed to vote for writers from their own country. The French, Spanish, Italians and Germans chose Shakespeare unanimously (only the British voted for Dante). We must of course take into account that different cultural contexts in Europe have resulted in various interpretations of Shakespeare's plays in Europe. The performance history of Shakespeare's most often produced play, *Hamlet*, in Eastern Europe is extremely different from that in Britain for instance. Social, cultural, economic and political circumstances are but several factors that have affected the way Shakespeare's plays are read and staged in each respective country in Europe. Nevertheless, the Shakespeare history of Europe is also marked by continuous inter-cultural cross-fertilisation; English wandering actors helped import and establish Shakespeare in Central-Eastern Europe, and the Continent later on affected the way Shakespeare was read and produced in Britain, for example. Due to such mutual influences, we therefore can and must speak of a European Shakespeare tradition.

The Globe replicas in Central and Eastern Europe, however, hark back to the original existence of Shakespeare's plays in London, and do not attempt to rediscover the early conditions of Shakespeare performances in their respective culture. Nevertheless, references to the Globe theatre in Shakespeare's texts and the fact that the plays were written for the Elizabethan stage establish a link between the plays and the original playhouse. The Globe is therefore a worldwide symbol of a shared Shakespearean history. In London the building has additional symbolic and nostalgic value, due to its proximity to the original site of the Globe. The function of other Globe theatres, however, is less obvious: how should Shakespeare be performed in such reconstructed ›authentic‹ spaces; do the plays have to be in English in order to make them ›authentic‹; what constitutes ›authenticity‹; is it achievable, and to what avail? These are but a few of the questions concerning the European trend of performing Shakespeare ›authentically‹. Even directors and actors at the London Globe, currently in its sixth season, are in the early stages of understanding how to use this space and how it would have been utilised in the Renaissance. I would like to address some of the issues the London Globe faces in producing Shakespeare's plays in an Elizabethan replica theatre, and outline problems that may affect other Globe theatres in Europe. I would also like to discuss some of the differences between the playhouses and suggest possible areas of co-operation. With the increasing unification of Europe, we should also consider whether the Globe theatres need all have the same purpose, or whether they can serve different functions. In order to determine the inter-European connections with regard to Shakespearean tradition, I would also like to outline some historical developments.



1 Billington, Michael: They've rebuilt Shakespeare's theatre and got rid of the actresses. But they still need the public floggings'. In: *Guardian* June 2, 1999, p. 4.

2 Weimann, Robert: Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatres: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1978, p. 7.

In respect to any Globe theatre today, the limitations of authenticity' must be taken into account. One must ask whether a twenty-first-century audience can indeed relate to an Elizabethan play, with references to Renaissance history or mentality, in a reconstructed Elizabethan playhouse? Or will our contemporary culture perforce permeate an attempted ›authentic‹ production and affect the directors', actors' and our own interpretation? At the London Globe, the audiences face the additional demand of following early modern English, in contrast to the Globes in Prague and Germany, which also offer plays in updated Czech and German translations respectively. Michael Billington in the *Guardian* criticised the London Globe as a »pointless exercise«, since »you cannot reconstruct the original sound of Elizabethan English [...] Nor can you recreate the mindset of the original playgoers«. ¹ This is largely true, but not entirely relevant. These remarks are similar to those made by critics of literary translations, claiming for instance that an audience watching a translated play, performed in a different country, could not possibly appreciate the play as much as a local audience would. Indeed, cultural differences might affect the understanding of a play, and puns, for example, could be lost in the translation, yet that need not mean that the play loses its relevance. The Globe obviously cannot and need not function as an ›authentic‹ Elizabethan theatre in order to entertain its audiences – but how is it relevant to the mindset of present playgoers?

The degree of authenticity the London Globe strives to achieve can only be relative, as evidence on even this most accurate replica pertaining to its original appearance, costumes, staging and audience is scarce and patchy, and is often supplemented by scholarly guesswork. However, the London Globe offers the unique opportunity to see Renaissance plays in a setting most similar to the playhouses many of these plays were written for, and thus to develop insights into such aspects as staging and communication between stage and audience through practice and not just through theoretical speculation. The London Globe provides the possibility to translate the plays back into their original setting, in some respect allowing for the purest performance possible in terms of staging.

The process of transforming text into performance necessitates not only a linguistic conveyance of meaning, but also a culturally relevant interpretation. I would like to use the London Globe's 1998 production of Shakespeare's most controversial play, *The Merchant of Venice*, in order to illustrate some aspects of the unique fusion of ›authenticity‹ and modern culture achieved in this theatre. This production of *The Merchant of Venice* is the prime example of a play that elicited unexpected reactions from the audience, as a result of confusing clashes in the director's ›authentic‹ and modern approaches. The playgoers' misguided responses were not only the consequence of problematic aspects in the production; the ambiguity in the Globe management's encouragement of audience participation must also be taken into account as a factor that affected the interplay between spectators and actors. The discussion of the Globe will also demonstrate that audience response is not an isolated reaction, but an essential part of performance that needs to be taken into account in the general analysis of drama.

The Globe in London challenges theatre semioticians' conventional definitions of audience behaviour by providing an unusual setting for performance, which encourages two-way interaction between actors and audience as a result of its intimate, open-air structure (an evenly lit theatre-in-the-round, with a large stage that thrusts out into a yard). It is this mutual relation which makes each Globe performance a one-off event. The interactive mode is one of the Globe's foremost features in performance, distinguishing it from most other theatres. However, the relationship between actor and audience is not just a result of the theatre's architecture; »rather, it is connected with some of the most basic economic and social forces in history, of which both drama and the theater (as social institution and architectural design) are reflections *and* agents«. ² The Globe as an ›authentic‹ replica and a social institution was conceived as a product of »social forces in history«, as a representation of a similar theatre born four centuries earlier as a result of other such forces. We now have a playhouse that was originally constructed in the Renaissance with certain socio-economic provisions in mind, such as packing in as many theatregoers as possible. Today, the latter priority is subject to various confinements such as safety regulations and acceptable levels of comfort. The form of playhouse deemed suitable for Renaissance playgoers therefore no longer conforms to the standards found in most modern theatres. Similarly, the interaction between actors and audience, which is part of the Globe experience today, is also con-



3 Critics have argued that extemporising practices, esp. those of clowns, were a fading tradition in Shakespeare's time once the playhouses emerged; cf. Kiernan, Pauline: »Fictional Worlds«. In: *Around the Globe*. Iss. 8, Winter 1998, pp. 4-5.

4 Mahood, M.M.: Introduction to: Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1987, p.42.

5 Kiernan, Pauline: Findings from the Globe 1998 Season: *The Merchant of Venice*. In: www.rdg.ac.uk/globe/research/1998/MoVPrepa-ring.htm and Kiernan, Pauline: interview with Norbert Kentrup. In: www.rdg.ac.uk/globe/interviews.

6 Mark Rylance's (Artistic Director) Prologue to all four programmes from the 1998 season. Shakespeare's Globe, 1998.

7 Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. London: Penguin 1968, p. 24.

ditioned by changes in social conventions, and would have been different in content and possibly in form, in Shakespeare's day.³ Even though the fixture of the audience as ›fourth wall‹ is beginning to be eroded at some theatres, the audience's role is usually relatively passive in comparison to the spectators' very active behaviour at the new Globe. The Globe today is therefore a hybrid: an attempt to replicate a historic building, imbued with a geographic and symbolic significance, as well as a theatre with performances that must be made relevant to a modern audience. This unique mixture results in aspects that are altogether new and unconventional to the field of theatre.

The relevance of plays is also affected by historical changes and is subject to our cultural frame. *The Merchant of Venice* aptly illustrates the impact of history on the reception of a play. *The Merchant* has been controversial throughout most of its performance history, and its interpretation has been affected by changing social, political, economic and cultural landscapes; nevertheless, along with *Hamlet*, it is the most often performed of Shakespeare's plays.⁴ One reason for the popularity of the *Merchant* is its complexity and consequential susceptibility to a variety of interpretations. It has therefore been embraced and transformed by many cultures often to carry meanings unintended by Shakespeare. These transfers to other eras and social contexts have combined our understanding of Shakespeare's social milieu with a modern message or approach. Even though the modern audience in question was located in an ›authentic‹ replica of a Renaissance theatre, and possibly expected to see an ›authentic‹ production at least in terms of costume, the production of *The Merchant* at the new Globe also had to find a way to be relevant. It was decided that one of the productions of the 1998 season, *The Merchant*, would contain ›authentic‹ aspects, but not an all-male cast. The authentic methods included: several interval-free performances, the doubling of parts, researched historical costume (made from original materials, using dressmaking techniques of the period), researched historical music (played on period instruments) and seating of spectators in the balcony above the stage.⁵ The programme of *The Merchant of Venice* (as well as programmes of other plays that season) included a message from the Globe's Artistic Director, which acknowledged the dual notion of authenticity and contemporaneity, but may also have confused the audience:

Wherever you have come from you need bring nothing more to this play than your own life today in 1998. Hamlet tells the players that they must hold the mirror up to nature, so your role as an audience is to bring your own nature for us to mirror. If you want to measure the quality of the play, don't worry that you must compare it to another production, or judge it by the latest theory, have no concern if you don't know how good the actors may or may not be or how authentic, just measure it against your own life [...] Shakespeare and his fellows placed their thoughtful observations in an emotional story, let yourself get involved. If you feel like playing as well, we would love to pass the ball to you, join in. We'll let you be in our dream if we can be in yours.⁶

The message initially appears to be pluralistic in reflecting the Globe's awareness of its audience coming from all walks of life and from diverse countries. It remains ambiguous, however, whether the audience is addressed collectively or as individuals – whether there is a general disposition of society in 1998 that the production wishes to mirror, or whether every individual should feel as though their life was being reflected in the stage action in some capacity. The message fails to make the significant distinction of whether the playgoers are encouraged to react to the play individually or as a mass. The rest of the message makes apparent the Globe's attempt to prescribe a mindset to its audience. Spectators are instructed not to feel obliged to compare this to other productions. This request is somewhat condescending, as most of us will make qualitative judgements when going to the theatre, often based on comparisons to other productions. We even rely on critics to evaluate performances on our behalf, help us discriminate between productions and aid us in deciding whether we should buy a ticket in the first place. Peter Brook regards this as part and parcel of the institutionalised and commercialised theatre industry (which mostly came under his category of ›Deadly Theatre‹ in *The Empty Space*). Going to the theatre has become a ›risk‹ as a result of ›too many disappointments‹, according to Brook.⁷ Even the cornerstone of any performance, the acting, the Globe's programme states in the same patronising manner, need not be the spectators' concern; there is almost a suggestion that spectators would not be able to distinguish good from bad acting. By asking the playgoers to leave behind the types of assessment they are accustomed to using in modern theatres, the



8 Samuel T. Coleridge coined this phrase in *Biographia Literaria*. Chap. xiv, 1817.

9 Rylance, Mark: Meet the real Shakespeare. *Around the Globe*. Iss. 8, Winter 1998, p. 32f.

10 Eytan, Sharon: The Jew of Venice or the German of Bankside. In: *AJR Information*. July 1998, p. 7.

Globe is setting itself apart from such theatres and from the general theatre culture the audience is familiar with. Those spectators who have primarily come to experience Shakespeare's Globe by definition rather than a specific performance, who are there for the authenticity they believe earned the theatre its name, are also asked to change their expectations. The objective is to let go of all conventions that are part of the normal theatregoing experience as well as any preconceptions of the ›authenticity‹ that distinguishes the Globe from other theatres, and be willing, as a playgoer, to ›let yourself get involved‹. The form of involvement is not defined. It could be understood as a slogan summoning the ›willing suspension of disbelief‹⁸, or as license for vocal or other expression. This quasi-manual for enjoying a play at the Globe ends on an even more ambiguous note: the audience is invited to ›play‹. It is noteworthy that the term ›interaction‹ is not used, which would imply interplay between the actors and the audience, probably initiated on stage. The active verb ›play‹ opens up numerous possibilities – it could suggest the audience is also to perform. The theatre critic Benedict Nightingale accused Mark Rylance, the Globe's Artistic Director, of asking the audience to be pretend-Elizabethans. Rylance dismissed this as absurd. However, he didn't clarify what the Globe was encouraging the playgoers to do.⁹ Most of the demands Rylance makes on the audience could be regarded as self-serving, as he appears to be asking the spectators to dismiss any potential flaws in the productions. He closes the address with a meaningless slogan that idealises the Globe experience as a surreal one. The vagueness of the instructions ultimately provided the audience with a freedom to do as they wished, which proved a critical factor during the run of *The Merchant of Venice*, when the audience's reaction occasionally took centre-stage.

Richard Olivier, who directed this production, attempted to defuse the racism in the play by using a multi-ethnic cast. While delivering his moving and indignant ›equality speech‹ in Act 3, Scene 1, Shylock was accompanied on stage by Salerio and Solanio. Significantly, Shylock was played by a German actor and the two Venetians were played by actors of Indian and Oriental descent. In order to debunk this particularly tense scene, Olivier opted for irony and had the Venetians continuously jeer at Shylock during and after this speech (no such stage direction occurs in the original playtext):

Hath not a Jew eyes?
Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses,
affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with
the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed
by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same
winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us
do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If
you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us
shall we not revenge? (iii.1.54)

Part of the audience located in the upper galleries consequentially joined in with the vicious laughter. The other spectators, visibly distracted and baffled by the reaction, attempted to locate the source of what they obviously thought to be inappropriate mockery, many shaking their heads in dismay. Olivier's concept had backfired, and the fictional frame had been broken. Some playgoers even turned to strangers next to them to discuss the incident. Not only does this incident indicate the apparent difficulty in performing this controversial four-century old play in this age of supposed pluralism and political correctness, it shows the unpredictability of the Globe as a performance space.

When spectators counter the intentions of the actors and director, problems become most apparent. Following the performance of the *Merchant* described earlier, Norbert Kentrup, who played Shylock, voiced his surprise and anger at the reaction by some of the audience: ›I can't believe that people are so aggressive to[wards] Jewish people [...] there was a Chinese, an Indian and a Jew on stage, and people laugh at human rights‹.¹⁰ Kentrup's statement, however, reflects the confusion in the company's approach to the play, as late twentieth-century notions of political correctness clash with the fictional characters of a Renaissance play. Ironically, even though the multi-ethnic cast was deliberately chosen to defuse the hatred towards Shylock, Kentrup apparently expected the audience to view the other two actors not in terms of the identities of the characters they played, but in the context of their own ethnic identity. Thus when he negated their



11 Ibid.

12 My interv. with Norbert Kentrup at the Globe, 05.06.1998.

13 Eytan 1998, p. 7.

14 Weimann 1978, p. 212.

15 Weimann discusses the traditional forms of performance of the popular actor in Shakespeare's youth: »[E]specially the comedian with his extemporal wit, performed not so much for an audience as with a community of spectators who provided him with inspiration and, as it were, acted as a chorus [...] The spectator who challenged the actor had the weight of the audience behind him.« (p. 213). Weimann suggests that the socially hierarchic division of the audience into groups was emerging in Shakespeare's day. (pp. 213f.), but does not outline how this change affected the audience in terms of interaction.

16 Kiernan 1999, p. 118.

Venetian aspect, the symbolic value of his own German nationality in relation to the Jewish protagonist was lost. The production as a whole had pluralistic, anti-racist intentions, but the ironic brutal laughter the director called for during Shylock's gravest speech did not produce the intended effect on the audience. What it achieved instead was a backlash. Following several occurrences of this reaction, the company changed the scene, and Shylock delivered his speech according to the original text, without interruption by the cast and to an extraordinarily silent Globe audience. Kentrup explained that the initial reaction to his soliloquy was a result of the Globe's interactive nature, which allowed »the dark parts of the human being« to emerge, and that even if 100 people mocked Shylock, 1 400 will have learned something. Nevertheless, he believed that the Globe's production of the play did not encourage the audience to react to all the characters in an appropriate manner, the problem being that the company was »too nice«. In his opinion the corruption of the Christian characters should have been portrayed more emphatically.¹¹ Kentrup said, »At some moments of the play Shylock should be hissed and booed at, but also his counterparts should be hissed and booed at during other parts of the play. The audience must decide who has the right position in the conflict [...] In spite of this we only play the story, not the conflict.«¹² Indeed, the audience hissed at Shylock several times during the play, but failed to boo when Portia made a racist remark about the Prince of Morocco's »complexion« (only occasionally would the audience express their sympathy towards Morocco when he exited), or hiss when Graziano called Shylock an »inexorable dog«. The vices of the Christian characters (such as Portia, Antonio and Bassanio), in Kentrup's opinion, convey the play's universal message: »I believe it is not anti-Semitic; Shakespeare brings out all the things we all have in our souls and have to fight«. For this reason Kentrup did not wish to depict Shylock as a villain. He regarded Shylock in this production first and foremost as »a father, whose daughter marries a black Christian and runs off with the equivalent of a million DM«. To Shylock, he said, this is equal to her being dead and is what prompts his revenge, which puts him on a par with the Christian characters. Kentrup wished to depict a Shylock who experienced an emotional struggle and is a fatherly and multi-faceted, rather than an allegorical minority figure or a villain.¹³ Olivier not only used multi-ethnic casting to soften a potential anti-Semitic reading of Shylock, but appropriated the script to further deal with racial issues in a way that was dramatically irrelevant to Shakespeare's play. Once the scene central to the idea of the ironically intended multi-racial cast jeering at Shylock was changed, the purpose to tackle prejudice was defeated.

The power of the audience in the performance described beckons an inquiry into the status of the audience at the original Globe. Robert Weimann regards the relationship of actor and audience in Renaissance theatre as an essential custom of the traditional popular theatre, which

presupposed a collaboration between dramatist and audience in the creation and visualization of dramatic setting [...] The proximity of actor and audience was not only a physical condition, it was at once the foundation and the expression of a specific artistic endeavour.¹⁴

Weimann does not define the form or content of the interaction between audience and stage in the Elizabethan period, however.¹⁵ Kiernan, in the first book published on staging practices at the new Globe, argues in the conclusion to her findings that »[i]f the interaction between player and playgoers is allowed to interrupt the story, the fictional world is subverted and the play suffers«. ¹⁶ While Weimann regards the audience as an essential part of the performance, Kiernan outlines the potential threat it poses to the play. I would like to differentiate here between the notions of the play and the performance, a distinction Kiernan does not make. When a play is interrupted by the audience or for other reasons, this need not mean that the performance will suffer. The extemporisation brought about by the incident itself and/or the subsequent reaction of the actors can be seen as an integral element of performance at the Globe and will often provide additional entertainment. Yet the ›success‹ of an interruption relies on its semiotic relevance. Usually, the most entertaining interruptions are acknowledged by the audience and the actors, or are made relevant when reality echoes fiction, such as a thunderclap coinciding with the mention of a storm. The reaction to Shylock's equality speech described earlier was disruptive because it was an ethically inappropriate response by a small fraction of the audience, that was not acknowledged by the actors and diverted the attention of the majority of the spectators away from the stage. As discussed, the director, rather than the audience members in question, was to blame for the reaction. Viewed in the context of the performance, the spectators' reaction was



17 Ibid. p. 28.

18 Gruber, William E.: *The Actor in the Script: Affective Strategies in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra*. In: *Comparative Drama* 19, Spring 1985, pp. 30-48.

19 Kiernan 1999, p. 28.

20 Fynes Moryson as quoted by Limon, Jerzy: *Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1985, p. 1. – Limon states that the players resorted to travelling due to the known reasons of Puritan opposition to the theatre, the plague and competition from other companies, esp. children's companies from 1600. The type of performance described was true of the initial stages of travelling actors at the end of the sixteenth century; over a century later the troupes were better equipped and performed in German (pp. 3-5).

21 Ibid. p. 2.

appropriate: ›Hissing the role, or the fiction, not the actor or playwright, is a different matter. If the playgoers are joining in the fiction, are they disrupting performance or adding to it?‹¹⁷ The audience reacted to the fiction in a manner which Olivier had wanted to avoid by employing a multi-cultural cast in order to make the play more relevant and palatable to a modern audience. By introducing a modern social dimension that was not part of the play's fictional world, he confused the spectators. He failed to take into account that the Globe was not a modern theatre, which uses technical devices to create an illusionary play world. Today's audience, conditioned by such theatres, as well as by the naturalism of cinema and television, was not prepared to maintain the dual level of fiction and realism that Olivier sought to achieve. Renaissance audiences would have been more accustomed to the non-illusionary:

Renaissance commentators, when they describe their reactions to histrionic performance, frequently indicate an awareness simultaneously of the character and of the actor's degree of impersonation and metamorphosis. This awareness by no means distances them critically from the performance. Even when they describe empathic responses [...] to a character, Tudor and Stuart theatregoers – unlike modern audiences – not only tolerate visible contradictions between actor and role, but apparently they consider them to be the affective basis of spectating.¹⁸

As modern theatre attempts to blur the contradictions between the actor and the role, semiotic theory has not gone beyond defining that which is not an intentional part of a performance as extradramatic.

The term ›audience performance‹ gives a better sense than ›response‹ or ›participation‹ of the audience being both proactive and reactive, and goes some way towards suggesting the nature of the new relationship between the staged illusion the actors create and the extradramatic world of the playgoers which the new Globe seems to foster. But this is not an adequate term, and it will be necessary to invent a new one, which is itself a measure of the extent of the change which this relationship has undergone in the different physical conditions of the new Globe. If playgoers are hissing the characters; if the characters are ›answering‹ them with unwritten dialogue; where is the ›extradramatic‹ of this exchange? If we call it ›semi-extradramatic‹ to qualify the usual distinction of fictional and theatre worlds, do we mean this extemporization is somehow existing outside the fiction?¹⁹

The Globe in London is still in the process of defining audience interaction, and a lot can also be learned from the Globe theatres in Prague and Neuss about audience behaviour.

The London Globe, in its attempts to make plays more accessible to its audiences, has used physical comedy as an essential element in some productions. Unscripted physical comedy was not necessarily a part of performances at the original Globe, but its universal appeal was already recognised by travelling English actors at the time of the original Globe. These companies were referred to as ›*Englische Komödianten*‹ (English comedians, though the term ›*Komödianten*‹ may also have defined ›actors‹ in general). They performed in Central-Eastern Europe and gained great popularity. An Elizabethan traveller witnessed such a performance:

[...] when some of our cast despised Stage players came out of England into Germany, and played at Franckford in the tyme of the Mart, having nether a complete number of Actours, nor any good Apparell, nor any ornament of the Stage, yet the Germans, not vnderstanding a worde they sayde, both men and women, flocked wonderfully to see their gesture and Action, rather than heare them, speaking English which they vnderstand not.²⁰

The advantage of performing comedy, as opposed to tragedy, outside the theatre lay in its logistic flexibility and its physical appeal to non-English speakers. In a different account, the same traveller, Fynes Moryson, claims that the English actors were superior to their Continental counterparts. He also reports that the actors developed an avid following, similar to that of pop stars by ›groupies‹ today: ›Many young virgines fell in love with some of the players, and followed them from citty to citty till the magistrates were forced to forbid them to play and more‹.²¹ The popularity of the actors amongst an audience that was unable to understand what they were saying is striking. However, performers like the *commedia* actor Marcello Magni proved at the

22 Interv. with Norbert Kentrup. In:
www.rdg.ac.uk/globe/interviews.

23 Ibid.

24 Poel, William: *Shakespeare in the Theatre*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson 1913, p.48.

25 Mahood 1987, p. 48.

26 Ibid.

27 Shaw, James: »The Merchant of Venice«. In: Parsons, Keith / Mason, Pamela (Eds.): *Shakespeare in Performance*. London: Salamander 2000, p. 136.

Globe that it is possible to engage the audience without resorting to language. Whereas traveling actors in the Renaissance probably presented looser, shorter versions of comedies that were played at London playhouses such as the Globe, the acting at the theatres would have been more polished and formal. The Globe therefore employs methods ›authentic‹ to the Renaissance period, but not necessarily to the Globe or theatre in Elizabethan England.

The reason for the Globe's use of ›authentic‹ as well as experimental devices, such as the unscripted, *ad lib* acting described, is that we don't really know how plays were staged in the Renaissance. The conspicuousness of the active yard audience means that actors can get carried away and play only to the yard, which is less challenging, especially vocally, than playing at an angle wider than 180 degrees to fifteen bays located on three levels. Norbert Kentrup confirmed that he felt the company had not spread itself equally in playing to the audience, and criticised the way the play was directed: »Nobody knows how this space works [...] we don't play to three sides, nor is the play directed with three sides and three levels in mind, we don't include the audience; instead, most is focussed to the front like a proscenium stage«. ²² The groundlings often become the focal point of the actors, encouraging the playgoers in the yard to take part in the performance. Spectators seated in the galleries can be left feeling alienated from the action, as the actors are playing to what seems like a more privileged part of the audience close to the stage. Kentrup felt unprepared for the unique and unpredictable demands of this theatre:

I feel that it is absolutely absurd that we try to be authentic down to the underwear. But we don't work on understanding this space... After a while, I decided that I would rehearse alone in the evening on the stage. Therefore I was able to discover more and more about my character, my relationship to the audience and my way of acting on the Globe stage. ²³

The issue of ›authenticity‹ in the theatre has been a major point of contention, not only in relation to replica theatres; it has concerned actors, directors and scholars over the last few centuries. With regard to *The Merchant of Venice*, an attempt to restore textual authority and historic authenticity was already made in 1898, when William Poel broke with the conventions of tragic Victorian productions of the play and launched an ›Elizabethan‹ *Merchant*. Poel challenged the contemporary view of the play through a parody of the first quarto's title page: »The tragicall Historie of the Jewe of Venice, with the extreme injustice of Portia towards the sayd Jewe in denying him the right to cut a just pound of the Merchant's flesh, together with the obtayning of the rich heiress by the prodigal Bassanio«. ²⁴ Poel's cynicism reveals his belief that the play was being misinterpreted and was not loyal to the original Elizabethan meaning. The latter was not necessarily accepted as the suitable meaning anymore. His production for the *Elizabethan Stage Society* in a theatre-in-the-round flopped, because Poel had chosen to reinstate Shylock the buffoon, complete with red wig and false big nose. ²⁵ Shylock had become too established in the form of the humane tragic hero, and the audience was not going to accept the authentic over the current, albeit unhistorical, interpretation. This example demonstrates the pointlessness of ›authenticity‹ when it fails to address the social frame it is introduced into.

In 1932, thirty odd years after Poel's production, the Russian director-designer Theodore Komisarjevsky highlighted the release from convention and the search for new interpretations of *The Merchant* in his visually striking performance in Stratford-upon-Avon.

His production opened to a scamper of pierrots against a scenic background which sent up all ›picturesque‹ productions by its crazy bridges and leaning towers. Shylock was a Jewish comedian from the music halls, Portia a china doll who donned a vast wig and spectacles for the trial. The Duke went to sleep. It was not Shakespeare's play, but it was a piece of much-needed iconoclasm. ²⁶

Komisarjevsky updated the play, however, at the same time remained more loyal to Shakespeare than most of his predecessors, as his playtext was virtually uncut. ²⁷ In text, therefore, it was very much Shakespeare's ›authentic‹ play. The carnivalesque treatment of the play in performance was symbolic of the release from the web of social, historical and theoretical confinement it had always stood under, and was metaphorically speaking, Shakespeare's *Merchant* with a modern face-lift. The influence of scholars and directors from Eastern Europe, such as Komisarjevsky, Kozintsev and Kott on Shakespeare in the theatre and on film has been highly significant and has also changed the face of Shakespeare production in Britain.



28 Stribrny, Zdenek: Shakespeare and Eastern Europe. Oxford: Oxford UP 2000, p. 1.

29 Ibid., p. 8f.

30 Ibid., p. 13f.

31 Ibid., p. 21.

32 Ibid., p. 23f.

The earliest example of Central and Eastern European contribution to Shakespeare scholarship is the engraver Wenceslaus Hollar (1607-1677) from Prague, whose etchings and drawings of seventeenth-century London were a crucial source for the reconstruction of the Globe in London.²⁸ Shakespeare would have probably received some information on Elsinore and other locations in his plays from the English travelling actors described earlier, some of whom Shakespeare would have known, including Will Kemp. The possibility for English actors to work on the Continent may have inspired Shakespeare's plays. European royals, such as Maurice of Hesse, acted as temporary patrons for English actors, who stayed at court for lengthy periods.²⁹ Prince Vladislaus of Poland even sent for theatre equipment and professional actors from London, and English actors were »imported« to Poland in 1617-1618. In 1637 Prince Vladislaus opened his court theatre. English actors were able to test advanced staging techniques, sophisticated mechanical equipment and scenery.³⁰ Meanwhile, in England, the Puritans shut down the theatres in 1642 during the Civil War. Only after the Restoration in 1660, when theatres re-opened was new stagecraft used in London. While the English actors gained popularity in Europe, in England Parliament passed an order in 1648, which labelled actors rogues, who could be punished by prison, fines and public flogging.³¹ In a sense, Continental Europe was responsible for the continuation of the Shakespearean stage tradition in the mid-seventeenth century. It is also significant that women were first allowed on stage by an English company on the Continent. English companies could afford to be more progressive in Europe, away from the Puritan regime.

The early reception of Shakespeare and his contemporaries in East Central Europe proved the adaptability of the plays to any geographic location, staging condition, social milieu and religio-political situation. The high professional standard of the English Comedians was appreciated, with predictable exceptions, at the imperial, royal and ducal courts in Vienna, Graz, Prague, Warsaw, or Koenigsberg [...] commercial centres such as Gdansk, and at many other larger or smaller towns in Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, Silesia, Poland, Prussia, Pomerania or Livonia. [...] the impact of the English Comedians in Central and Eastern Europe was very strong and lasting, inspiring the development of the native theatre in its entire artistic and social gamut.³²

When we take into account the popularity of Shakespeare in Central and Eastern Europe, the long-standing tradition that performances of his drama had in these regions since his lifetime and the impact it has had on local cultures, we must perceive Shakespeare as part of European culture. It should therefore not come as a surprise that the Polish scholar Jerzy Limon from the University of Gdansk has started a movement for the restoration of a building, which was used as a theatre by English actors from the early seventeenth century. This former fencing school is thought to have been a replica of the Fortune theatre in London. Limon would like to see the building restored to its original site and functioning as a cultural and educational centre similar to the Globe in London. The Prague Globe, on the other hand, is not a reconstruction of a theatre that once stood in the area. It claims to be a relatively accurate representation of the original Globe in London. The theatre is located in an amusement park in Prague, which contains two further modern theatres. The location of the Prague Globe is somewhat gimmicky, and it remains to be seen whether it will be accepted as a *bona fide* theatre or be regarded as a theme-park offshoot of the London Globe, which indeed is still being likened to an Elizabethan Disneyland in some academic circles.

Eastern European productions of Shakespeare's plays have been highly politicised, especially over the last century. The changes taking place in Europe at present and in the future will inevitably affect the interpretation and production of Shakespeare. The demand for ›authenticity‹ in Eastern and Central Europe, expressed by the construction of Globe and other replica theatres, may also contribute to different orientations with regard to the performance of Renaissance theatre and may also restrict the diversity of Shakespeare productions in Europe. It is therefore essential to consider the individual roles these theatres are to play within the European cultural landscape. The examples from the Globe in London reveal the complexity in making ›authentic‹ theatre meaningful and culturally relevant. It will therefore be necessary to promote cultural exchange amongst European theatres, and to encourage Globe theatres to develop individual identities. It would be unfortunate for the ›Globes‹ to be considered regional branches of a chain of ›authentic‹ theatres.

