LITERATURE

PURITAN AND QUAKER OPPOSITION TO PERFORMANCES OF SHAKESPEARE IN THE EARLY AMERICAN THEATRE

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It is not difficult to guess who is the author of plays which bring, within the space of a single year, an income of about four million dollars to the average American theatre; plays which attract from the remotest corners of the country and indeed of the world crowds of enthusiastic participants in the full splendour of annual theatre festivals; plays, moreover, which supply an impulse for the hundreds of innovative American stage managers who create performances of the highest quality. This position in the contemporary theatre of the United States of America is occupied of course by Shakespeare.

It cannot, however, be claimed that to-day's American stage is saturated with Shakespeare or that theatrical life closely revolves around performances of his works. It is not easy, admittedly, to decide in which direction the American theatre is moving and what are the currents that carry it along. One thing, however, is certain: every outstanding American stage-manager does Shakespeare. This comes not so much of a need to test their own creative abilities, as of a conviction that without the name of Shakespeare no theatre can exist at any time or in any place. When Shakespeare's contemporary, the poet Ben Jonson, described him as a man "not of an age, but for all time", he encapsulated in this statement the profoundest truth about the genius of the poet of Stratford and his role in the annals of the theatre.

The esteem which America accords to Shakespeare is incontestable. His works have a permanent place in the repertoire and never cease to amaze the audience with skill with which their author strips bare the nature of man. Such is the position to-day, but who initiated that process which in three hundred years was to grow to such gigantic proportions?

While Europe, still illuminated by the Italian Renaissance, was teeming with strolling players; while the theatres of London vibrated with a rich life of their own and Shakespeare was writing his last romances, the first English settlers were cautiously setting foot on the untamed land of America in order to build new towns, and in them, theatres. Who were these newcomers, what values nourished their intellects, and what was their understanding of the culture that they now had the opportunity to create in the vast laboratory which was the America of that time?

When the first settlements were established in New England, the eyes of the English Puritan moralists were turned towards the theatre on the Thames. Convinced that drama finds no support in the Bible, they deemed the public stage to be a source of corruption and demoralization. At first, the opposition of the religious non-conformists to the theatre bore the marks of moderation, but the intransigence of their leaders in parliament led in 1642 to the closure of theatres all over England.

Thus, the new era in the theatre begun by Shakespeare contained an episode which was for a long time to cloud his genius and to debar from the theatre countless masses of spectators.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, the proclamation of the principles of Puritanism was a cause of dissatisfaction and even of royalist anxiety. With the accession to the throne of James I, however, persecution of Puritans reached a climax. The frontal attack on this semi-illegal religious movement forced the Puritans to abandon England en masse and seek the land of Canaan elsewhere. In the years 1630—1643, sixty five thousand people left England for America and the West Indies; about twenty thousand of these were Puritans.

It all began with the "Mayflower", the modest English ship which in 1620 landed at Cape Cod in Massachussetts, instead of at Virginia, where a small settlement had already been in existence for ten years. It had on board no more than a hundred and two passangers, of whom half belonged to the so-called Separatists, members of a Protestant sect who had quarrelled violently with the Crown and the Anglican church. On December 21, 1620, this small group founded a colony at Plymouth, thus laying the foundations of American civilisation. They were to have a lasting influence on the complexion of the American theatre.

The first arrivals were far too busy with the accomplishment of urgent tasks to spare a thought for the construction of theatres. It was not until the foundations of the new community's existence were assured that Shakespeare could reach the homes of the first Americans. A few of them possessed collections of his plays, which they read by candle-light. A hundred years pass, however, before we find an advertisement by a Dr. Joachim Bertrand, in the New York *Gazette* (March 23, 1729) that he intends to play the part of

the apothecary in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This is the first trace of the existence of Shakespeare on the amateur stage in America. We do not know whether he was performed earlier than this. The lack of archive records leaves us with only vague information about the extent of the early theatre.

Among the English settlers in the growing Protestant colonies, there was no lack of enlightened men of intellect. On the slow voyage across the Atlantic, the more educated of the passengers often reached for the comfort of their mother culture, bringing with them books and news-sheets. Moreover, although it is true that colonial libraries were full of titles on religious subjects, it was frequently possible to find works from the pens of the most outstanding English dramatists. In 1723, one of the librarians of Harvard College recorded the accession of the collected works of Shakespeare and Milton; and copies of *Henry IV*, (part II) and *Richard III* with Admiral Penn's own signature had been preserved to this day. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the number of Shakespearean titles increased considerably in libraries along the whole of the Eastern seaboard.

Shakespeare wrote his plays, however, not for publishers but for the theatre. The admiration of sections of the intelligentsia for the Elizabethan dramatist did not yet mean that they had a favourable attitude to the stage. To familiarise the Puritan public with the name of Shakespeare—for this was the purpose of the companies of professional actors who sailed over from England in the middle of the eighteenth century—was not a task that was simple or quickly accomplished. The majority of the emigrants, regardless of position and educational level, were united by fanaticism in matters of Protestant faith. Those who thought otherwise were expelled from the colonies. Much more than in England emphasis was placed on inner piety; reactions to every symptom of freethinking and libertinism were severe. New England's God-fearing community, governed dictatorially by colonial oligarchy, was stamped from the same mould as the overzealous Puritans who in 1642 dealt a violent death-blow to the theatres in England. Entertainment in the shape of the theatre was, in their judgment, conceived by the Devil, and was Satan's instrument for "turning man away from his duties towards God" (Degler 1976(3):7). In their eyes the theatre bore responsibility for diminished church attendance, for fires, for plagues, for the degeneracy of women and the infidelity of husbands.[1] At the very dawn of colonization, the preacher William Crashaw delivered a sermon to the settlers at Virginia, in which he roundly castigated actors. Discussing the plan to establish colonies he stated that wandering players, together with Papists, constituted one of the most serious threats to the development of the settle

[1] See especially Hugh Rankin (1965:2).

ments. Condemning them for the sloth that is induced by lack of steady work, Crashaw judged actors to be a valueless element in the creation of the new culture.

Thus it was not only material factors, and the hardships encountered in colonising America, that delayed the penetration of Shakespeare to this part of the world. The essential cause was the Puritan's hatred of entertainment and that of the theatre was reckoned to be particularly unworthy.

The centres of Puritan orthodoxy in the North were especially hostile towards the stage. Even a consummate diplomat like David Douglass, who for almost twenty years had been the leader of the most famous American company of professional actors in the eighteenth century, had to confess himself defeated by the uncompromising authorities of the northern provinces. The obscurantism that sprang from a Protestant world-view was so strong among the inhabitants of this area that *Othello* was almost never shown on the stage under its original title. The fame of a verbosely detailed play-bill from 1761, which deftly masks the true nature of the drama, has survived to our times. It announces to the citizens of Newport on Rhode Island that they will shortly be able to hear "a Series of Moral Dialogues... Depicting the Evil Effects of Jealousy and other Bad Passions and Proving that Happiness can only Spring from the Pursuit of Virtue".[2]

The performance of *Othello* at Newport came after two attempts to obtain the permission of the town council. The custom whereby wandering players had to petition for the permission to perform was not just a peculiarity of the early American theatre. This practice was widespread in Europe in the seventeenth century, and was the effect of the low esteem in which actors were held at that time. But while in eighteenth-century Europe actors enjoyed a special position in public life, the destiny of strolling players in the colonies was dependent entirely upon decisions of the town authorities. There is no doubt that the verdict of the councillors was influenced by the letters of recommendation, which the leaders of the troupes brought with them from their previous place of performance. This was the case, for example, with *Othello* when played in Newport. Having found a respected and generous patron in the person of the governor of Virginia, where they perfomed immediately before travelling to Rhode Island, the company was able to present a letter conveying a high opinion of their art.

After performing at Newport the company made their way to Providence, the second biggest settlement in Rhode Island colony. It is worth recalling here that the entire area of this colony laid beyond the jurisdiction of the

[2] This play-bill, preserved by one of the leading actors of the Douglass company, Mr. Morris, was many years later copied by John Bernard, an English comedian who came to America in 1797.

orthodox theocracy of Massachussetts. Although this region enjoyed freedom of conscience and relatively democrative liberties, the fate that hounded actors paralysed their activities even here. The anti-artistic emotions of the citizens of Providence were so firmly rooted that the actors were forced to curtail their repertoire and ultimately to abandon their performances. None of Shakespeare's works could be staged, and because of contradictory evidence about the life of the early theatre, it is uncertain whether Shakespeare was performed in New England at all after 1761. The celebrated historian of the colonial theatre George Seilhamer, expressed the conviction that the appearance of the London Company at Providence in 1762 were the last chance for the citizens of New England to view Shakespearean performances before the War of Independence (cf. Seilhamer 1888:123—28). However, the struggle to preserve the moral purity of citizens and prevent their exposure to the corrupting influence of the stage was won by the opponents of the theatre, and the actors had to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The company made their way to the southern provinces, where without hindrance they performed a whole series of Shakespearean plays, receiving massive public applause. Let us return, however, to New England.

There was no place in the world more hostile to Shakespeare than the eighteenth century Boston. In 1750 this bastion of Puritanism was shaken to its foundations by an unexpected theatrical event. In one of the town's coffee-houses a group of unknown actors performed Thomas Otway's drama, *The Orphan*. The storm of indignation which immediately followed provoked the civic authorities to proclaim a ban on all stage peformances. Repressive measures were applied to the disobedient, most often in the form of fines. From the fragmentary records that have survived to this day, it is difficult to ascertain the amount of the fines; in Rhode Island the sum was as much as fifty pounds.

The London Company battled with the unrelenting enemy for many years, but Boston's Puritan community, believing itself to be chosen by God for the fulfillment of noble ends, condemned every kind of amusement and luxury. As late as 1792 the same company attempted to invigorate the public life of the city, announcing performances of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* in the form of the now notorious 'moral dialogues'. Neither of the advertised tragedies, however, gained the approval of Boston's moralists and the official prohibition concerning any form of theatrical entertainment, which had expired three years earlier, was restored. The actors were arrested.

Another symptom of the Puritans' degradation of drama was the fact that the word 'theatre' had to be avoided all over the northern colonies. In some cases the places where performances took place were referred to as 'moral-lecture-rooms'. More commonly, however, they were described as 'concert halls' or simply 'schoolhouses'. The identification of plays with

concerts is a direct reflection of the crisis of the English drama in the Augustan period. It was at that time that an Oxford actor, Samuel Foote, challenging a censorship decree promulgated in England in 1737, invited friends to his "Little Theatre" in the Haymarket, for so-called 'concerts of musick', or 'auctions of pictures'.[3] This degradation of the stage to the level of simple entertainment was dictated by the attitude of the English court, which conceived the theatre as a forum for subversive political ideas. At this time the Shakespearean path is one of continual adaptation, accomplished by the carefree touch of a Colley Cibber, Tate or indeed the famous David Garrick. In their interpretations, little remained of the spirit of Elizabethan drama. 'Modernised' Shakespeare, on the model of French psuedo-classicism, was played on the boards of Drury Lane to enthusiastic audiences. It was not surprising, therefore, that the strolling English players who undertook the Atlantic voyage presented the works of the master on the basis of Garrick's interpretations. It often happened that Shakespeare's name did not appear on the play-bills at all, whereas everyone knew the name of the adapter.[4]

This 'improved', often reduced to a single theme, Shakespeare was used to provide the Protestant public with noble, edifying entertainment — all "in praise of the Lord". Having entered the London stages in pseudo-classic costume he accommodated himself to the tastes of the audience of the time. In order not to wound their faint hearts, the 'big four' tragedies were provided with 'happy endings'. In the colonies these adaptations proved to be a useful device enabling Shakespeare to reach the American public. In practice each advertised play contained long vocal parts which in the eyes of the Puritan extremists could not merit condemnation. Often it was the only way for a play to be performed. The preference for vocal displays at the cost of the action or the elaboration of ceremonial parts were most effective in enabling supplicant actors to gain the authorities' approval.[5] Convinced of the unquestionable moral stature of the work, the town council would grant permission for its performance.

The middle colonies already showed a certain moderation in the battle with the stage. The cosmopolitan character of New York and Philadelphia was undoubtedly influential in this respect. In these places there were

[3] The Licensing Act, according to which theatrical performances were subjected to rigorous censorship by the Marshal of the Court, granted a licence to administer only two theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Foote obtained a separate privilege to present plays.

[4] This was the case when *Richard III* was performed at Williamsburg in 1759.

[5] Especially in *The Merchant of Venice*, shown at Williamsburg by the Hallam company, and in *A Winter's Tale*, when the whole plot was reduced to a single thread and retitled *Florizel and Perdita and the Sheep Shearing*.

often highly cultivated people sitting on the town councils. They were anxious to allow artistic activities as a means of alleviating the harsh realities of everyday life. In such cases, actors could rely on the help of the authorities.

Founded upon trade and profit, and numbering at mid-century just over seven thousand inhabitants, New York offered a climate that was mercantile rather than intellectual. From the collision of two European civilisations — English and Dutch — a specifically American culture was emerging more and more clearly. As in New England, however, the religious sects embarked upon a war with the world's oldest cultural institution. How surprised Lewis Hallam must have been, directing the first company of trained actors in the New World, when, after an unusually successful season in Virginia, he encountered massive opposition in New York. Hallam, officially recognized as the father of the professional stage in America,[6] arrived in Williamsburg from London in 1752 to captivate local audiences with a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* which inaugurated a nine-month season. In the conviction that he would succeed in repeating his Williamsburg triumph the troupe set about preparing to stage three of Shakespeare's plays: *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear*. But neither a letter from the governor of Virginia, expressing full support for the players, nor Hallam's personal request for permission to present plays met with a positive response from the town council. The leader of the company, however, did not easily admit defeat and soon began energetic efforts to obtain official consent. As a result, he inserted in the columns of the New York *Mercury* an appeal to the "worthy Inhabitants" of the town, in which we read that the company had "...little imagining, that in a City, to all Appearance so polite as this, the Muses would be banished, the works of the immortal Shakespear, and others the Greatest Geniuses England ever produc'd, deny'd Admittance among them, and the instructive and elegant Entertainment of the Stage utterly protested against..." (NY*M*, July 2, 1753). Hallam asks, therefore, for gracious acceptance of his company and for a more favourable attitude to the craft that he practises. No fewer than three months passed before the Council decided to permit the actors to start New York's first theatrical season on September 17, 1753. The inaugural performance was *The Conscious Lovers* by Richard Steele. This highly "moral" play was deliberately selected to open the season, for it was intended to show that the theatre brings with it nothing that might harm the moral educations of Calvinist believers.

After Steele it was Shakespeare's turn and *Richard III* was performed for the New York audiences. The play, presented in Cibber's version, and

[6] Lewis Hallam, having violated the Licensing Act of 1737, left England not so much to pursue his artistic ambitions as to provide the means of subsistence for his family.

with the author's name omitted, was received with genuine enthusiasm. *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* enjoyed a similar reception.

With a numerous and well-schooled troupe at his disposal, Hallam decided to try his luck in the British Empire's second largest city (after London), Philadelphia. This exceptionally beautiful town with its abundant verdure and handsome buildings flanking broad paved streets was the heart of colonial America. As America's principal centre both of commerce and of culture and learning, it attracted dissidents fleeing from religious persecution. By mid-century, Philadelphia had become the most cosmopolitan place in America and also its largest centre of Quakerism. It was to this place that the "Apostles of Light" sailed from Europe, exalting with passionate intensity of industry, inner discipline and self-education.

The Quakers had immeasurable influence on the cultural life, press and public institutions of Pennsylvania. As early as 1700, the General Assembly passed a law prohibiting "stage-plays and revels", which it classed among "rude and riotous sports".

Hallam's arrival in Philadelphia was preceded by the visit of an actor who belonged to the group, a certain Malone. To him fell the task of "preparing the ground" for future performances. In the event of success Malone was to be entrusted with the role of Falstaff in *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The negotiations about whether the English actors should be admitted inside the walls of the town ended in failure, and Malone's hopes of a Philadelphian engagement were dashed. Seeing that no purpose would be served in prolonging his stay in the city, he returned to New York and warned the manger of the thorny path that lay ahead of the company.

Hallam had already conceived the intention of travelling to Philadelphia some time earlier, and regardless of the failure of Malone's mission, there was no question of changing his plans. When in the spring of 1754 the London Company arrived in the Quaker citadel, the campaign against the theatre was raging at a furious pitch. Fortunately, the cultural elite of Philadelphia headed by mayor William Plumstead, wielded a good deal of influence in public affairs. When the anti-theatre fraction addressed to the governor a letter requesting that the actors be refused permission to play, on the grounds that this would be tantamount to a violation of public morals and a profanation of received religion, the theatrical party placed in the governor's hands a counter-petition, thus thwarting the endeavours of the opposition. In the end, permission was granted for twenty four performances, on condition that nothing should occur on the stage that was contrary to decorum.

The season in Philadelphia was short-lived, and plans to adorn the infant stage of the New World with *Henry IV* (part 1) proved to be too ambitious. The repertoire was made up principally of Restoration comedies of manners, which demanded neither elaborate stage sets nor seasoned audiences. Four

of Shakespeare plays—*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear* and *Richard III*—were presented at Philadelphia, but we have no information about how they were received. The principal press censors were Quakers, and they never allowed the printing of reviews of theatrical events. We know only that two epilogues, both printed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, were spoken during that season, and being in their nature an argument in behalf of the theatre they praised the spirit of the despised acting profession and celebrated the name of the author of *Hamlet*. We also know that on the stage, converted from an old warehouse, appeared the motto: "Totus mundus agit histrionem".

Although the theatre was gathering strength, it continued to be the object of conflicts and malicious polemic. Exhausted by the disarray that its presence provoked, the London Company preferred to steer towards safer harbours. They set southwards for Charleston, where the more refined tastes of the rich planters, patterning their lives on those of the English aristocracy, created an atmosphere that was very favourable for the stage. Following their season in Carolina, the troupe left for Jamaica where Lewis Hallam died shortly afterwards.

The death of their leader, who was an excellent organiser as well as an actor of considerable quality, did not mean the end of the Hallam family's contact with the stage. Dissolved in 1754, the company was reassembled four years later. The position of director fell to David Douglas, Mrs Hallam's second husband.

New York was chosen for the début of the second London Company. Here, despite the obstacles created by the town council, theatrical opposition was not as well organised as in Philadelphia and, therefore, less effective. Moreover, New York style of life differed somewhat from that of cosmopolitan, Quaker-dominated Philadelphia. In New York the settlers from the Netherlands loudly celebrated the feasts of Christmas and the New Year, occasions when the strict observance of correct manners was more relaxed.

When Douglas's company arrived in the city, the building in Nassau Street, adapted earlier by Hallam for use as a theatre, had been demolished. In its place stood a church. The most urgent need, therefore, was to build a playhouse. A frail building, called Cruger's Wharf, was quickly erected, but as this was done without the consent of the authorities, the town Council would not allow plays to be performed there. Douglas decided then to use the building for more "devout" purposes. He announced in the columns of the New York *Mercury* that since he was unable to present performances in the new building he desired to turn it into a "Histrionic Academy", an institution that could become a school of good manners. Puritan circles, assiduously hunting out every trace of the company's activity, judged

Douglass's project to be no more than a subterfuge. Confronted with these suspicions, the manger felt obliged to explain to the citizens of the town that, in accordance with the regulations of the authorities, whose "humble servant" he was, it was not his intention to present any plays but only to offer a cycle of "dissertations on subjects moral, instructive and entertaining" (Seilhamer 1888:93).

We do not know whether the town council was more concerned with giving Douglass a reprimand or with manifesting their disapproval of public spectacles because, surprisingly, Douglass soon received permission to open a theatre. For thirteen evenings the company had an opportunity to show itself in its true colours to the New York public. At the end of this period, and after payment of debts incurred in the building of the playhouse, the actors were ordered to leave the town.

During this first New York season, marked by frequent disruptions, two of Shakespeare's plays were presented: *Othello* and *Richard III*. This time we have absolutely no information about how the plays were received at Cruger's Wharf or how many people saw them.

The second phase in the artistic life of the London Company under Douglass was Philadelphia. Benefiting from his experience the leader of the troupe was now more cautious in his dealings with the authorities. He immediately applied to the governor for permission to set up a theatre. Governor Denny agreed, on condition that the income from one of the performances should go to the Pennsylvania hospital. These conditions were accepted by both sides, and Douglass proceeded to the erection of a theatre building. The negative attitude of the municipal council towards this project made it necessary for an improvised building, named Society Hill, to be put up at a place beyond the jurisdiction of the authorities. Before the building works could be begun, however, the religious communities of the town declared war on the theatre. The advance guard was formed by the Quakers, who wrote, in a letter of protest to the authorities, that it was with deep dismay that they heard the news "that a company of stage-players are preparing to erect a theatre and exhibit plays to the inhabitants of this city, which... if permitted, will be subversive of the good order and morals..." (Seilhamer 1888:101). The next day, a letter similar in content was sent by the Lutherans who were followed by the Presbiterians and finally by the Baptists. This collective petition reached the governor, who did not, however, consider that there were sufficient grounds for altering his earlier decision.

From June 25 to December 28, 1759, despite unremitting attacks from religious reactionaries, the second London Company was able, without noteworthy hindrance, to present plays at Society Hill. Shakespearean cycle was opened by *Richard III*, and also included *Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*. *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* were performed by the troupe

for the first time, and indeed it was the first production of *Macbeth* on any stage in America. Hamlet was created with great sucess by Lewis Hallam (junior), who three months later became the first Macbeth in the history of the American stage.

To comply with the governor's request, *Hamlet* was performed towards the end of the season, and the proceeds were donated to the hospital. The hospital managers accepted the money, although they acknowledged that the performance had taken place without their consent. Bearing in mind the law prohibiting public spectacles, the administration refused to have anything to do with the actors. The governor, who had shown the actors so much indulgence at the beginning, was blamed for causing this confusion.

In cases like this, refuge was found in the liberal south, where actors were always welcomed and their performances eagerly received.

In August 1761, the governor of New York, Cadwallader Colden, announced in the local newspaper that he was giving his approval for the erection of a theatre in the city. This decision inevitably attracted protests from the enemies of the muse. In the columns of Parker's *Gazette* a certain guardian of public morals using the pseudonym "Philodemus" crudely inveigned against those citizens who succumbed to the allure of the theatre. His attack was directed particularly against women, who by wasting their time with such unworthy amusements exposed themselves to unfavourable comments. Texts of this kind laid the foundation for an outpouring of polemics which continued for several weeks in the pages of this journal. Regardless of the slanders hurled at the actors, the theatre in Chapel Street was launched, and on the third evening New York saw *Hamlet*. The report of the performance, published in the New York *Mercury*, was full of criticism, mentioning bad acting and the disreputable behaviour of the actors. In addition the reviewer opined that the play itself was far from perfect. Douglass replied to these reproaches, informing readers that the plays performed by his company had been in England "read and admired by the... most virtuous". As for the reputation of the actors, they could boast of great success, while he himself was "of a good family and has a genteel and liberal education" (NY*M* Dec 28, 1761).

During that season the company performed the repertoire already known to the American audience, and on December 18th the immortal figure of Falstaff appeared on the colonial stage for the first time. Douglass created the role himself. In addition to *Henry IV*, (part I) and *Hamlet*, there were also performances of *Romeo and Juliet, Richard III* and *Othello*. *Romeo and Juliet* was presented twice, probably in Garrick's version.

This short season was becoming ever more difficult for the London Company. On the one hand, the conservative Puritans saw in the actors a threat to their rigid moral principles. On the other hand the merchants accused

the players of extorting large sums of money from the citizens, as the theatre was not, after all, the cheapest form of entertainment. Within a short time, the playhouse built by Douglass was wrecked. It is not clear what provoked this act — whether it was motivated by religious prejudice or perhaps by political enmity, since as an English group the company did not arouse a friendly response from those patriots who were preparing for the struggle for independence.

Realising how greatly he was hampered by the defects of his theatre building, as well as the technical problems of staging, Douglass made up his mind to build a permanent playhouse in Philadelphia. On November 21, 1766, the famous Southwark Theatre, America's first permanent theatre building of brick construction, was ready for public use. Although visual records show that it was not handsome structure, it is still spoken of today as the first 'temple of drama' in the New World.

The reaction of the Quakers, of course, was the same as it always had been. This time, moreover, the leaders of the Society of Friends — as the Quakers called themselves — did not spare from their reproaches all those citizens who sympathised with the investment of money in such an unworthy enterprise.

The company, which at this time changed its name to the American Company, were able to count their third season as the most successful so far. Shakespeare remained firmly in the repertoire, so that his fame spread ever more widely. Shakespeare's first play to be performed in the new theatre was *The Taming of the Shrew*, or rather *Catherine and Petruchio*, the name under which the comedy was advertised on the posters. Some writers maintain that the cycle of Shakespearean plays at Southwark was opened by *Richard III*, and not by the above mentioned farce in the Garrick style, cut down to three acts and played as an afterpiece.

All in all, eight Shakespearean dramas were performed on the stage of the Southwark Theatre. The popularity they had already earned on other stages aroused expectations of success here as well. A play that attracted very great interest was *Cymbeline*, which had not previously been performed in America. Nevertheless, we read in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* that the auditorium was never filled, although the repertoire was repeatedly reworked, and the actors offered a glittering array of talents. To judge from the records that have come down to us, Lewis Hallam acquitted himself superbly in the roles of Hamlet, Shylock, Richard and others which he created.

The performances by the Douglass company created a deep artistic impression, but they also kindled endless polemics. In the *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, between February and May 1767, a series of articles appeared, advocating ever more agressive action against the stage. Writing under the pseudonym of "Eugenio", an adversary of the theatre asserted that it is a fundamentally evil institution, because it corrupts the minds of upright believers who are more and more tempted into a life of wealth and comfort. These temptations, after all, were not in accordance with prevailing religious principles. The theatre was surely a source of moral depravity, for "even in Shakespeare the sublime flights of poesy scarcely atone for the low buffonery with which his best pieces abound" (PCh Feb 16, 1767) — writes the author. Another opponent of the theatre declared that matters had gone so far that for some people the theatre was more important for moral education than the church.

In the summer and autumn of 1767, Douglass devoted his energies to the building of a theatre in New York. The structure of the building was reminiscent of the Southwark, except that New York's "John Street", as it was called, was constructed mostly of wood. From the moment that construction work began, the building became the most hated place in town. When religious fanatics appealed to people not to attend public spectacles, the result was a boycott of the stage. Soon the players left New York.

One of the last chapetrs in the chequered history of the American Company took place back in Philadelphia. Here, the company settled for good. The fact that *King John* was performed there during the season of 1768 is evidence of considerable artistic maturity on the part of the troupe. The newspapers, however, still did not contain any reviews of the plays which were staged. On occasion they would offer some conventional compliment, but most often they dismissed the spectacle with a single sentence. An invaluable source of information about the Philadelphia of the sixties is the diary of Captain Graydon published under the title, *Memoirs of Life Chiefly Passed in Pennsylvania*. To him we owe some information about the actors and their repertoire. The descriptions are full of praise for the players and admiration for their art. After seeing Hallam in the role of Hamlet, the writer of the memoris judged him to be the soul of the company. Nor was he sparing of compliments for the other members of the troupe. In his diary, however, the writer asks readers to forgive him for including this unworthy theme in his memoirs.

In 1774, the Continental Congress passed a Puritan-inspired bill, which prohibited the organisation of any kind of extravagant entertainment, in particular horseracing, games of chance and theatre performances.

After being performed for almost a quarter of a century on the infant American stage, Shakespeare disappeared from the New World theatre for fifteen years. After this gap, however, better times dawned for Shakespearean drama. His works, made accessible to thousands of spectators, no longer needed to be smuggled in under the cover of 'moral dialogues'. Soon after the War of Independence, the first edition of his works appeared, and the first literary critiques together with numerous newspaper reviews were published. A hundred years later the American stage was to welcome its most devoted

Shakespearean actress, Helena Modrzejewska, who had no fewer than seventeen Shakespearean characters in her repertoire.

Despite the rapid rise in Shakespeare's fortunes in the United States, we cannot underestimate his role in the colonial theatre, in which he enjoyed pride of place. Each new season added a further Shakespearean production, fifteen in all. Between 1750 and 1774 a total of one hundred and sixty six evenings were devoted to his works. A glance at the repertoire reveals that he was the most frequently performed playwright up to the beginning of the American Revolution. Called by some people "the provincial echo" (Dunn 1939: 4) of the English genius, Shakespeare demonstrated a gift for surviving in times when a religious world-view excluded manifestations of a humanistic attitude toward earthly life.

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