

How Shakespeare Made Trees Act¹

(In *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*)

By CHARLOTTE ENDYMION PORTER

A GARDEN is little apt to be thought of today, I suppose, as an appurtenance to a Theatre. Still less so as a scenic asset useful and close at hand to be drawn upon vividly for its native loveliness. Yet it was rendered not so very difficult for Elizabeth at Court and for Shakespeare both there and in his Public Playhouse. That it was easy enough toward the middle of his career is made evident by the Inventory item unearthed by Professor Wallace and published in *The Times* May 1, 1914. With the undebatable positiveness of a legal Latin record for the King's or Queen's Bench it lets us know of the landed property on which the Globe was put up and effected at the date of entry, May 16, 1599,—a last entry and at somewhat later date than the other entries of May 12 of the Brend Estate then passing to the heir, Nicholas Brend, and the Globe Site, from him on lease for 31 years into Shakespeare's hands and to him only by name. It lists "the Playhouse— (*Duomo*) newly built with the garden belonging to the same—(*cum giardino eidem pertinenti*), in the parish of St. Saviour aforesaid and the county of Surry aforesaid, now in the occupation of William Shakespeare and others (*et aliorum*).” Neither Cuthbert Burbage who was the owner of an expired lease his landlord would not renew, nor his brother Richard the actor and owner of the leased Blackfriars, appear to be as dominant in the deed of the Brend attorney and the Commissioners taking in charge this inventory, as the "Burbages" are made by any writers I have seen who relate the circumstances. And except, of course, in the case of the sedulously faithful Scholar, Sir E. K. Chambers, those who cite this Brend item of the lease seem to squirm at the phrase "with the garden belonging to the same." At any rate, they omit it. But since I am talking of Gardens as appurtenances to scenic effects on the Base Stage I do not dot it out with little dots.

It is in keeping with what I am to speak of that in his novice Plays, the trilogy of *Henry VI*, his tragedy of *Titus*, and the crown of his early Comedies, he enlists trees in the action. The Histories appear by Henslowe's entries as put on at the Rose; and at the same early date in 1592 there, his first playgoers give printed comment on witnessing them before August 8 and September 3

¹ Here and always I cite Shakespeare from original texts, Folio or Quarto, as in my 40 Vol. Edition of Shakespeare's Plays and Poems. This article was first delivered as a lecture at Wells College, November, 1926. Copyright by the author, 1931.

of that same year by specifying The First and Third parts respectively of the Trilogy. At the Rose we happen to know there was a Garden. And of that it is strikingly obvious that he did make a Scenic effect by means of it in the opening of the First Part—an effect moreover which prefigures the historic tragedy to follow in the other parts of the Wars of York and Lancaster. How strangely modern a stylistic prefigurement it is of what's to come before the emblems of the Red and White Roses on either side blend their struggles, after the Sequel of the downfall of Richard III. in that History, with the triumphant accession of the Tudors! And how it reaches on, with more meaning for the omission of direct reference to Elizabeth, the Golden Rose, thus made emblematic of the event in her own person.

Shakespeare's first Playgoer who has left any testimony, identifies the Opening History as 1 *Henry VI.*, by citing it with relation to its hero: "Talbot (the terror of the French)". It is the epithet repeated from French mouths by Talbot himself, and he is the hero of no other Play we know. The actor who had the strong man's part to render, must do it in an agony so galling (I. iv. 47) that we must perforce understand how here and in the rending scenes of Talbot with his son (IV. iv-vii.) the passion of it might unfailingly draw the tears, as Nashe says it did, of "ten thousand spectators at least (at several times)." A throng indeed for that small house, named the Rose from the roses long persistently growing there. (*Pierce Penilesse* . . . Written by Thomas Nash, Gentleman . . . Imprinted . . . 1592. McKerrow's edition, I, 211.)

The "littell Roos" had "two Gardyns." Thomasyn Symonds speaks thus endearingly of her home as she bequeathed house and rose-gardens to her parish in Southwark. The Trustees in charge of her bequest made their property over to Henslowe, March 4, 1564-5, assigning the remainder of its lease expiring 1605. His business arrangements followed for building a playhouse there. He speaks of it in his diary as in Framing . . . shortly to "be erected and sette uppe on a piece of its grounde or garden plotte." It was ready in 1587 and waiting for some years, predestined, it appears, to bring out a certain scene effectively by means of Thomasyn's Rose-trees, when Henslowe writes of beginning "the 19 of Febreary my lord Strange's mene as followeth". On March 3, 1591, following in the motley list of plays set thereunder, appears "Harey the Vj" with "ne" prefixed, supposed to be Henslowe's mark of a new play. Notable in taking in 3 pounds 16 shillings 8 pence then and keeping up the not common pounds entry, then dwindling, "harey" was repeated for 15 entries

from March on during 1592 until June 20, without sign from Henslowe of the three parts. But what of what? Where he fails to grasp that the new Play was *I Henry VI.*, Nashe had promptly identified it as that. And *3 Henry VI.* is not only identified as being at least one of Henslowe's vague "hareys" by the striking line from it (I. iv. 147) parodied by Greene in his *Groatsworth of Wit*, posthumously printed that September but also in his envious allusion meant to slur Shakespeare. Greene really identifies him as known by him and all London, then, to be its author.

If ever a garden made appertinent to a theatre and suggestive for its scenic action deserved itself, as a garden, to be called famous, I think it was Thomasyn's, which thus made Shakespeare first famous in London.

Sir Philip Sidney first caught the lovely look of those roses. His friend Sir Edmund Dyer lived within view of them, it is said. Being often there with him, Sidney was moved to bring it in to his Romance (*Arcadia*, Feuillerat's edition, p. 119), as "a place of Roses, all the rest flourishing green, the roses adding such a ruddy glow to it as though the field were bashful at its own beauty" and as if "made to enclose a theatre grew such roses."

Did not Shakespeare read *Arcadia*? All London did. Then Shakespeare's inwardly-burning ruminative eyes brooded over them. And as mind and hand went together, did he not find the place made to show forth a scene able to enact with grace the suggestion they gave him to sweeten his bitter plot, long and bloody, lying ahead of him to chronicle, with some simulacrum of symbolic beauty and peace of growth, also ahead?

"Within the Temple Hall we were too lowd" (begins Suffolk)
The Garden here is more convenient."

Shakespeare brings the group as to quiet their wrangling to the scenic rose-trees.

"Let him that is a trueborne gentleman" (shouts Yorke)
"From off this Bryer pluck a white Rose with me."

Somerset rejoins,

"Let him that is no Coward, nor no Flatterer,
But dare maintain the partie of the truth,
Pluck a red Rose from off this Thorne with me."

Overbearing Warwick beats him back with sneering puns:

"I love no Colours: and without all colour
Of base insinuating Flatterite,
I pluck this White Rose with Plantagenet."

Stubborn Suffolk joins issue sharply:

"I pluck this Red Rose, with young Somerset,
And, say withall, I thinks he held the Righte."

"Stay, Lords and Gentlemen!" puts in Vernon, to give a wily turn to the talk that may be useful,

"Pluck no more
Till you conclude, that he upon his side
The fewest Roses are, from the Tree cropt
Shall yeeld the other in the right opinion."

Somerset takes the dare,

"If I have fewest, I subscribe in silence."

"And I," says Vernon, and his ruse now triumphing, reveals himself.

"Then for the truth, and plainesse of the Case,
I pluck this pale and Maiden Blossome here,
Giving my Verdict on the white Rose side."

Yorke crows at that,— "Now Somerset, where is your argument?" In a flash back comes this from Somerset:—

"Here is my scabbord, meditating that
Shall dye your white Rose—red."

Then each retorts,— "Hath not thy Rose a canker, Somerset?" and "Hath not thy Rose a Thorne, Plantagenet?"

Swords and taunts are out together now turning these wearers of roses into insulting wranglers. So, even with roses, hot and hotter our playmaker whets their ire and iron, until Warwick sums up with the prophecy—

"—this brawle today
Grown to this faction in the Temple Garden
Shall send between the Red-Rose and the White,
A thousand Soules to Death and deadly Night."

The Garden was at hand to equip all the rest of the trilogy by levies on it: e.g., for Yorke's "close Walke along by the Wall." Over the Wall in the second play (iv, x.) Jack Cade tumbles to the ground at the same moment Iden

enters opposite, according to the stage directions and business of the Quarto. Iden enters philosophising on gardens and "quiet Walkes" while the famished Cade is lying "downe picking of hearbes and eating them." Presently Iden's Sword finds the poor fellow's belly. Finally in the third part (III. vi) the "thicke growne brake" is both the needed and decorative effect to make a "covert" from which the two actors—in their own names, Sincklo & Humfrey—"with crosse-bowes in their handes," hiding to watch the King, come out to waylay him.

Most abhorrent, in contrast to these examples, yet in the range of Shakespeare's gift for making the action of the play scenic by means of trees planted on the base-Stage, is his next novice stroke at it, also at the Rose, in *Titus Andronicus*. What does he devise there in the way of a "stylized" tree to signify and mark a villainy but the Elder tree?—The very kind of a tree which the lore of folk and the text has appropriated for hanging Judas!

That accursed scoundrel, Aaron, is introduced "alone," with this tree for interlocutor to do a deed of dreadful note. In this scene at the root of this tree he digs the "sutile hole." A snare, indeed, he means that pit to be. Here at the Rose in 1594, the base stage had a roomy trap. We are to see it work. The bodies that were tumbled into that trap seem to demonstrate its roominess.

The whole conception is anything but lovely. Yet in a certain artistic sense and by a slang use of the word, it is "lovely"—the effective way in which our novice manages to make suit the case either his fair roses or his hot horrors for his London audiences. The long-laid plan of the evil mind delighting in wickedness fixes our eyes upon Aaron. Passing over his unspeakable villainy, we see the tree threaten to revenge itself at the close of the Tragedy. It will be used as the gallows for Aaron's infant child.

Out of such might in wrong Shakespeare's 'prentice hand was made capable of Iago.

A thoroughly happy instance of his scenic faculty for making trees play necessary parts with his other actors arrives in one of the early comedies. That one is long known to have been played before the great Gloriana. The peak of *Love's Labour's Lost* assuredly is the eaves-dropping episode, where one by one each courtier-student inadvertently betrays himself to his predecessor on

the scene but unseen by each newcomer except the one first arriving. How much in love each one is! How eager to break his vow! how ready to unmask the hypocrisy of the one who followed and keep his own hidden! All that scene and play of amusing action depends upon the convenient eaves-dropping places afforded each, by the "bushes" and the "coppice edges," to hide from one another but not from the audience. Nor from Berowne.

Finally the climax depends upon "the sycamore tree." It is stout enough for Berowne to climb into. The original Folio stage directions made this clever stage action clear. "He stands aside." "The King stands aside," and so on. But Berowne's own words, as they all have hidden by stepping behind such nooks of vantage, go to show the position he is forced to take at last if not at first, quite apart to make the climax conspicuous. I suspect his first "stand aside" may take him to a hiding-nook he has been forced to surrender suddenly to the need of each last preceding eaves-dropper. Anticipating each, he is at last quick enough to prevent discovery there by himself by scrambling up the broad trunk of tree he has been actively lurking behind. At this juncture he himself says of this Puss-in-a-corner play of infants, as he calls it, what indisputably shows him to be then up a tree.

"All hid, all hid, an old infant play,
Like a demie god, here sit I in the skie,
And wretched fooles secrets heedfully ore eye."

Imagine the laughter of the Queen and her group of ladies!

This is true of the original text. "Advancing" has been interpolated by Editors.