

“Pedant Needs More Paunch”: Reviving Robertson Davies’s Annotations from his Performance Copy of *The Taming of the Shrew*

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Article abstract

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CATHLEEN MCKAGUE

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En 1949, la mise en scène par Robertson Davies de la pièce The Taming of the Shrew au Little Theatre de Peterborough a remporté le prix Louis Jovet pour la meilleure mise en scène au Dominion Drama Festival de Toronto et a valu à cette première production intégrale d’une pièce de Shakespeare au festival des éloges de la critique. Le manuscrit qui a servi à préparer cette représentation a été retrouvé dernièrement parmi des livres ayant appartenu à Davies qui avaient été donnés à la bibliothèque des collections spéciales W. D. Jordan de l’Université Queen’s. Ce texte qui n’a jamais été examiné ou transcrit auparavant contient des annotations et des critiques du metteur en scène, des notes sur les repères musicaux et la mise en place, des passages retranchés et modifiés, tant de précieuses informations sur l’interprétation élisabéthaine proposé par Davies en 1949.

Les annotations de Davies nous fournissent de nouvelles informations sur cette production et remettent en question les conventions de mise en scène qui avaient cours au Canada au milieu du vingtième siècle. À la lumière de ce texte, la production de Shrew au Little Theatre semble avoir été une comédie jouée et soucieuse des détails et de son caractère historique, son style ayant sans doute été inspiré par la production commedia dell’arte qu’avait signée Tyrone Guthrie au Old

Vic en 1939 et dans laquelle Davies avait tenu un rôle. D'ailleurs, on retrouve dans le premier roman de Davies, Tempest-Tost (1951), le modèle de mentorat mis en œuvre au Little Theatre; l'intrigue de ce roman s'inspire librement des notes de Davies et de l'expérience qu'il a vécue en mettant en scène le Shrew. En revoyant le récit du «mythe de la maturation» du théâtre canadien, l'étude que fait Kathleen McKague de cette mise en scène par Davies présente le théâtre amateur en tant qu'élément intrinsèque au tissu et à l'histoire de la culture du Canada.



Director and producer Robertson Davies's 1949 production of *The Taming of the Shrew* with the Peterborough Little Theatre was a big hit: it took second place in the Eastern Ontario Drama Festival in Brockville and won the Louis Jovet Trophy for best direction at the Dominion Drama Festival in Toronto, garnering critical praise as a “lively and colorful production” (Whittaker, “Surprise Finish” 21). Davies's performance copy for this production has recently been discovered in his personal book collection, acquired by Queen's University and held at the W. D. Jordan Special Collections and Music Library. Never formally examined or transcribed, this fascinating text incorporates director's notes and critiques, music cues, blocking, omissions, and alterations, offering invaluable insights into Davies's 1949 Elizabethan interpretation of this play.

Reviving Davies's annotations at once reveals and preserves new information—not only about this specific production, but also regarding Canadian amateur local theatre performance conventions that pre-date the Stratford Festival. Remarks such as “Bio turn up collar” and “Could Pet[ruchio] do Hamlet[’s] madness?” provide intimate glimpses into the comic gestures and sense of interiority informing this production (Davies, Insert 3 and 2). PLT's *Shrew* emerges as a lighthearted and supremely detail-oriented comic romp with an investment in historicity, its *commedia dell'arte* flavour likely imported from Tyrone Guthrie's 1939 Old Vic production in which Davies acted. While it was not advertised as officially participating in the Original Practices movement, its simple, versatile set and Elizabethan aesthetic produced a “Renaissance English” effect, perceived by reviewers and adjudicators alike. The “originality” that commentators detected in Davies's production seems to replicate Guthrie's innovation in terms of staging practices, positioning Davies at the forefront in the renunciation of otherwise script-bound, standardized blocking methods in Canada. While its British overtones likely served to historicize and legitimate Davies's *Shrew*, restricting “Canadian-ness” in speech and setting, this production simultaneously imported novel theatrical techniques that contributed to the revitalization of Canadian drama—both amateur and professional. Analysis of Davies's 1949 *Shrew* permits us a better understanding of the milieu out of which the Stratford Festival and other manifestations of Canadian theatrical professionalization materialized, as well as a deeper appreciation for previous achievements and current evolution in Canadian theatre.

Historians of the theatre have begun to recognize the importance of documenting and analyzing amateur and local theatre. Michael Dobson's *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance: A Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Sonia Massai's edited collection, *World-Wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance* (Routledge, 2005)

constitute just two of the growing number of noteworthy texts on this subject. Furthermore, formerly overshadowed by its comparatively big-budget professional, American, and/or British counterparts, Canadian amateur theatre has emerged as a legitimate topic of academic inquiry in its own right. Scholars such as Robin Whittaker, Alan Filewod, Allana C. Lindgren, and Marlis Schweitzer specifically address amateur performance in Heather Davis-Fisch's recent *Canadian Performance Histories and Historiographies* (2017), collectively arguing for the seminal contributions of amateur performance to the development of culture in Canada. These historians revise the "maturation myth" narrative, propounded in the 1970s by Don Rubin ("Creeping Toward a Culture: The Theatre in English Canada Since 1945") and others, that posited Canadian theatre history as an evolutionary process culminating in national establishments, thereby minimizing and eliding the cultural endowments nonprofessional theatre has generated and continues to provide. Filewod's *Performing Canada: The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre* (2002) was one of the first works to contest this "evolutionary" teleology, affirming both Canadian theatre and nationhood to be unstable concepts.

My article stands alongside these revisionist discussions, filling in gaps in the historical record and highlighting the impact of a particularly daring and "original" amateur production. Indeed, Davies's *Shrew* was not only Peterborough's first entry into the Eastern Ontario Drama Festival, and subsequently into the Dominion Drama Festival, it was also the first full-length Shakespearean play presented at the DDF, challenging the formerly-popular notion that "Shakespearean plays can't be done in a Festival" by amateur societies ("City" 15). It is a prominent example of Davies's long-standing involvement with nonprofessionalized drama and, as I argue, exemplifies Davies's ideal theatrical practitioner arrangement, one in which mentor (Guthrie to Davies; Davies to PLT; later, Guthrie to the Stratford Festival) provides structure for and nurtures growth in apprentice actors and organizations. Davies replicates this relationship in his first novel, *Tempest-Tost* (1951), a fictionalized account of amateur theatricals in which the professional actress-director from New York Valentine Rich shepherds Salterton Little Theatre's *The Tempest*: SLT's Nellie Forrester affirms, "The only thing that persuaded us to try [Shakespeare] at all was that you would be here to give it a professional finish" (29).

This mentorship model informed Davies's directorship, his writing, his views on colonialism, and his vision for the development of Canadian theatre. Taking a paternalistic approach, Davies argued in the Massey Report that Canada was without "the living tradition" (375) of theatre—disregarding the region's long history of indigenous performance—and therefore required guidance from professionals either "from England or from the United States" (372), asserting that "example is of the utmost value to those who would reach a high level of achievement themselves" (372). He positioned "the Old Vic centre" (391) as the ideal model for Canadian performance training, and later, with Dora Mavor Moore, convinced Tyrone Guthrie to shepherd Canada's Stratford Festival (Plant and Saddlemeyer 9). Deferring to a colonial model, Davies expressed confidence in the potential of Canadian drama, amateur and otherwise, if guided by professionals—often, British professionals. Davies's Anglophilia existed in tension with his nationalism. Clearly, as a playwright and practitioner, he believed that Canadians possessed theatrical ability; yet he deferred to British models for implementation. This very mentorship model informs Davies's work with the PLT: he was the foreign-educated professional, trained by a British master, who "accepted with alacrity" (Davies, Introduction 13) his post as amateur director. He harnessed Guthrie's Elizabethan

design and *commedia* elements as a tried-and-true formula by which to train his fellow Canadians as he had been trained.

Davies, a Companion of the Order of Canada, is often memorialized as one of the country's most influential novelists and academics, due to his literary success and his founding of the University of Toronto's Massey College. His passion for and involvement in the theatre, in both amateur and professional capacities, as practitioner and playwright are overshadowed by his non-dramatic literary accomplishments. This article addresses this elision by isolating one important moment in an oft-neglected lifelong career of performance involvement that began in Toronto's Upper Canada College in the 1920s and extended well into the 1990s with his penning of libretti. In fact, Davies's directorial experience with the PLT, and his very director's notes from the 1949 *Shrew*, inform his first novelistic venture, *Tempest-Tost*, which, as he mentioned in an interview with Susan Stone-Blackburn, he began in the *Shrew*'s post-direction period during the summer of 1949 (229). Although he vehemently asserts in the book's preface that "no reference is intended to any living person," Davies replicates use of the New Temple edition, reliance upon Purcell, specific remarks that he had given his PLT actors, and even his own directorial practice in bestowing upon the director's assistant, Solly Bridgetower, a play-text "fat with bits of paper" and performance notes (127). Scholars of Canadian literature would do well to revisit Davies's theatrical ephemera in order to glean deeper insights into his writing process and his other works.

Examination of this particular performance artifact provides us with intimate insights into the functioning of the (at the time) newly formed PLT under Davies's directorship. The troupe, comprised primarily of teachers who rehearsed in the attic of Peterborough's Central School, was one of the sixty-five amateur dramatic societies competing for entry into the 1949 DDF (Grant, *Man* 301-08). In focusing on this specific production, my case study encapsulates the experiences of Canadian amateur theatre practitioners just prior to the emergence of permanent, professional dramatic institutions such as the Stratford Festival, the Shaw Festival, and the National Theatre School of Canada. Canada's outstanding amateur drama paved the way for its professional theatre: Davies himself affirmed in 1973 that the accomplishments of amateur drama in the DDF provided "the largest and the strongest" foundation for Canadian professional drama (Foreword x). Davies's *Shrew* was one of the many celebrated amateur productions that fostered national confidence in the viability of a Canadian professional theatre.

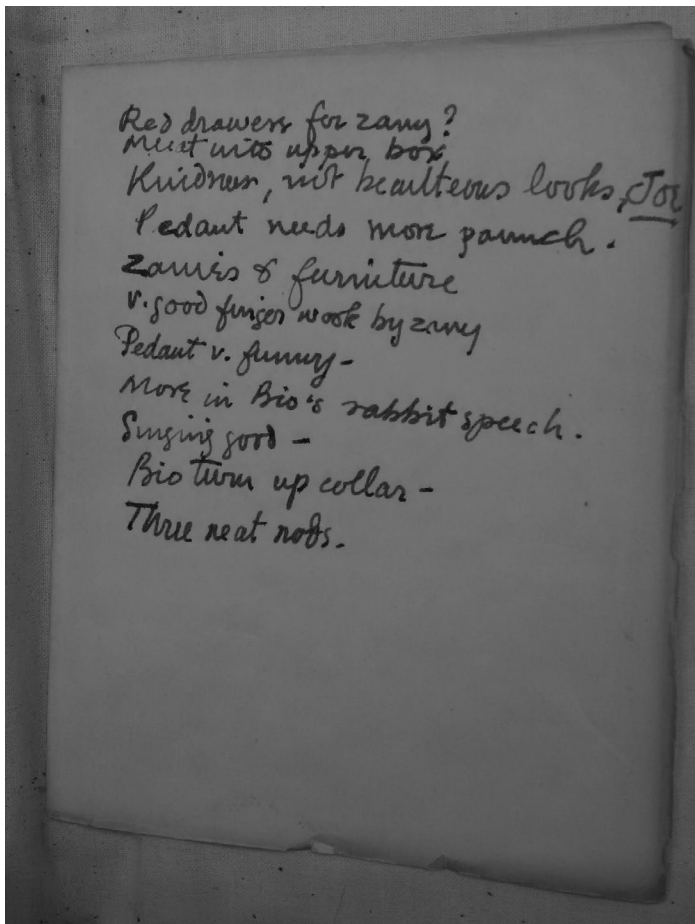
Item 671

Item 671 on the Windhover Study finding aid for the Robertson Davies Collection is a thirteen- by ten-centimetre leather-bound book with markings and "Inserted: three pages of notes." As it turns out, it is also a performance text used by Davies in a specific theatrical context.¹ The inside of the front cover bears Davies's crest, opposite his whimsically inscribed signature along with the words "Sept[ember]: 1948"—presumably the date of purchase—on the flyleaf. In its bottom right corner, the marbled flyleaf also contains inked-in references to three stagings: a three-day one in Peterborough, running January twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth, and twenty-ninth, 1949 in the Peterborough Collegiate and Vocational School auditorium; one in Brockville at a "Festival" (the Eastern Ontario Drama Festival),

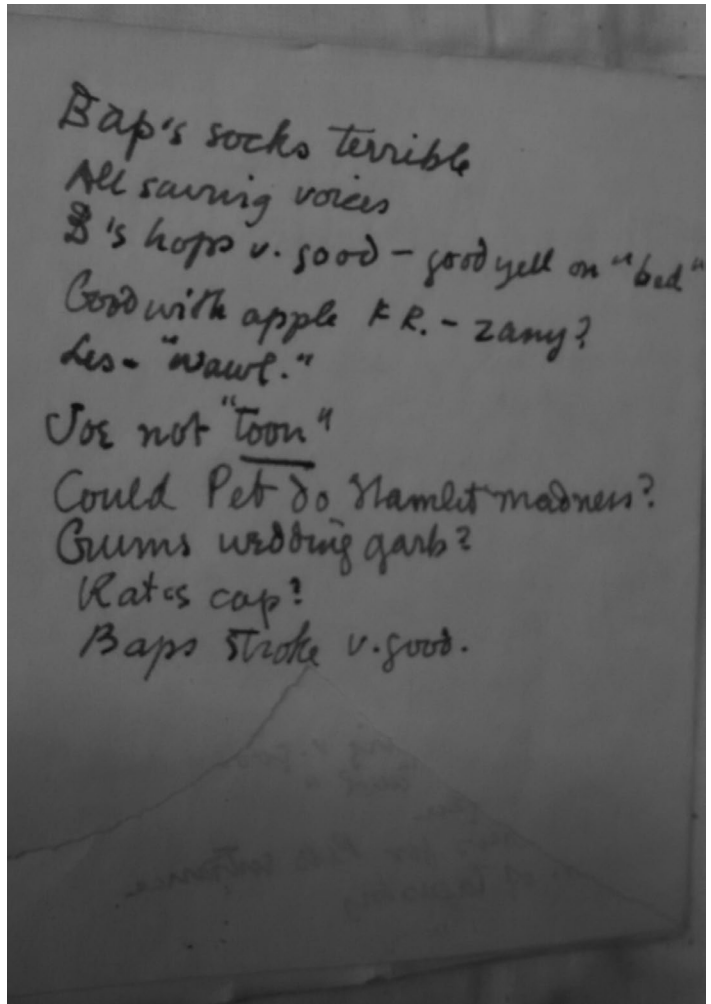
on February nineteenth, 1949; and one in Toronto at the Dominion Drama Festival on April thirtieth, 1949. The remainder of this copy of *The Taming of the Shrew* boasts various scribbles in red ink and pencil, printed in Davies's distinctive hand, indicating music and sound cues, omissions, stage directions, blocking, and alterations.

The book is compact in nature, and therefore well-suited for employment as a performance text, being relatively light and easily held in one hand. In fact, the base of the centre seam on most pages is discoloured in identical patches on either side of the seam (see image 5). These stains are very likely thumb-prints from Davies's own hands, arising out of contact with the natural oils in Davies's skin over time as he held the text throughout the rehearsal process. Thus, the text bears not only his written signatures, but those unknowingly inscribed by his body throughout the course of regular use. The latter signatures speak to the ways in which Davies interacted with the book, and its function.

The inserted "notes" that the finding aid mentions are, however, the most revealing aspect of this item (see images 1, 2, and 3). These notes have never been formally accessed or analyzed, and provide a privileged glimpse into the staged particulars of Davies's production.

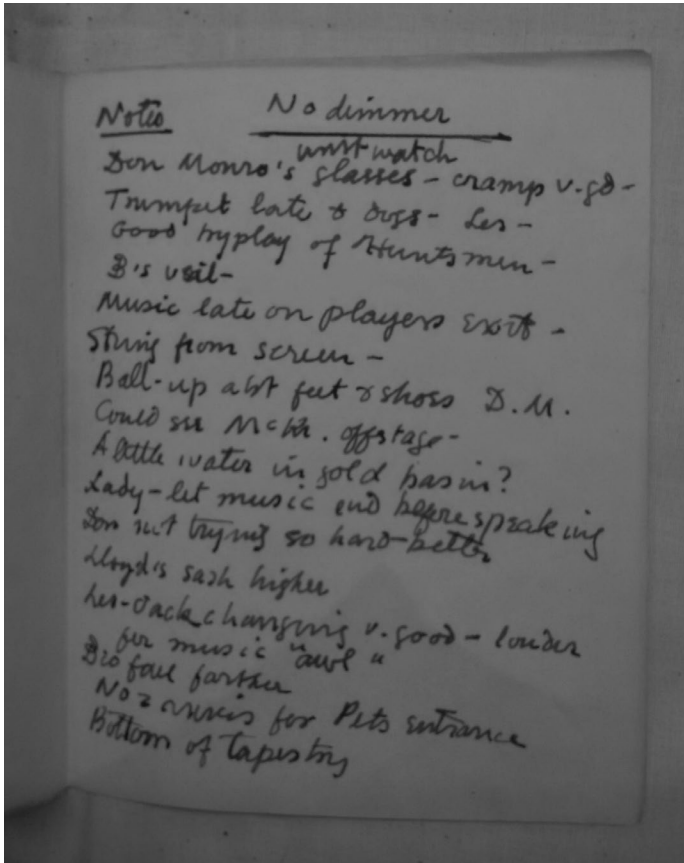


Img. 1. Insert, page 1.
Courtesy of W. D. Jordan
Rare Books and Special
Collections, Queen's
University, Kingston,
Ontario. Photographer:
Cathleen McKague



Img. 2. Insert, page 2.
Courtesy of W. D. Jordan
Rare Books and Special
Collections, Queen's
University, Kingston,
Ontario. Photographer:
Cathleen McKague

Scrawled in ink on a piece of blank loose-leaf folded into quarters, the remarks are director's notes written by Davies in what appears to be chronological order; that is, although Davies leaves act and scene numbers unmarked, his comments seem to pertain sequentially to events that occur in the diegesis. These notes were found tucked into the pages of Davies's text. Three pages of text follow under the heading "Notes," with the final page left blank. The lines along the centre seam of this insert indicate that the seam appears to have been folded both ways—though its current iteration places the first page that was written as the third page of text. There is a triangular section torn out of the second page, and the final page is left blank. Frustratingly, the insert does not indicate when the notes were written, so the precise stage of production to which they refer remains a mystery. The insert's provenance as a performance artifact for the 1949 production is secure, however, as it names PLT actors and technicians who participated in the staging, with whom Davies had not previously nor would in the future produce this play. Despite their inevitable lacunae, Davies's observations offer insights into the details, staging practices, challenges, and objectives of the Peterborough Little Theatre's 1949 *The Taming of the Shrew*.



Img. 3. Insert, page 3.
 Courtesy of W. D. Jordan
 Rare Books and Special
 Collections, Queen's
 University, Kingston,
 Ontario. Photographer:
 Cathleen McKague

Comic Subtlety

The play that emerges from these annotations is an energetic, lighthearted one that capitalised on the physical comedy inherent to *The Shrew*. Christopher Sly, Biondello, the Pedant, and Katherina seemed to be primary vehicles of this comedic bent. Sly, played by Donald Munro (spelled as “Monro” in Davies’s notes), appears to have been a particularly engaging character. Munro is the only actor that Davies named in full, with fore—and surnames—perhaps to distinguish him from Maralin Munro, the actress and costume designer of the same last name who played Bianca. Davies complimented Don Munro upon his physicality, asserting that his feigned “cramp [was] v[ery]. g[oo]d” in the opening (Insert 1). Presumably Munro as Christopher Sly developed some sort of cramp upon his entrance, perhaps a stitch in his side while fleeing from the Hostess (Mildred Bailey). Later, in Act one, Scene one when Tranio counters Lucentio’s professions of love toward Bianca with pragmatism and Latin idiomatic expression, Munro’s “Sly sleeps,” according to a stage direction in the margin inscribed with red pen (1.1.159-61). One wonders if Munro underscored his somnolence by snoring loudly at this point, drowning out the lines of Jack Nichols’s Lucentio and Les Woodruff’s Tranio. Clearly, Davies poked fun at both the notion of ardent, instant infatuation—Lucentio’s overblown romantic sentiments, in this case—as well as the antiquated effect of grammar-school Latin saws in a twentieth-century theatre, where few in the audience would have been familiar with the once easily recognizable idioms. Alternatively,

Sly's snooze may have intimated the character's boredom with romantic and scholastic endeavours. At any rate, this stage direction reveals an important fact about the staging: Davies kept Sly onstage—or if not onstage, at least in a visible position—throughout the first scene following the Induction, and also kept him actively involved in the production.

Donald Torney's Biondello was another enticing figure in the Peterborough troupe. Just after he complimented the actors playing Tranio and Lucentio on their clothing swap—"Les-Jack changing v[ery]. good," on page one of the insert—Davies remarked, "Bio fall farther." The placement of this comment, bookended by remarks upon the disguising of Biondello's master and fellow and Petruchio's entrance, seems to align it with Biondello's entrance in Act one, Scene one. Thus, Torney's "fall" in this instance was likely either a startled stumble on initially encountering the cross-class disguises of his peers, or an astonished lurch at Lucentio's (fabricated) revelation, "For in a quarrel since I came ashore / I kill'd a man and fear I was descried" (1.1.230-31). Alternatively, it could have represented a swift movement toward the audience so as to confess in aside, "ne'er a whit," in response to Lucentio's question, "You understand me?" (1.1.234). Whichever way Torney staged this scene, evidently his physicality catalyzed the exchange's humour.

At the end of the play, Torney's Biondello encountered Lucentio's father, the true Vincentio (played by Clayton Bullock). Vincentio was being apprehended and imprisoned for reputedly impersonating himself, when in fact it was the Pedant (Arnold Nofall) who was impersonating Vincentio. At this point Davies suggested in his notes to Torney, "Bio turn up collar—" (Insert 3). Conceivably here Davies wished Torney's Biondello to attempt, furtively, to hide himself from Vincentio's recognition in a ridiculous and futile manner. Biondello, greatly perturbed, laments to Tranio and the Pedant, "O, we are spoil'd! and yonder he is: deny him, forswear him, or else we are all undone" (5.1.98-99) before rushing offstage with his fellows "*as fast as may be*" (100), as the script reads. The futility and urgency of Torney's gesture no doubt inspired laughter.

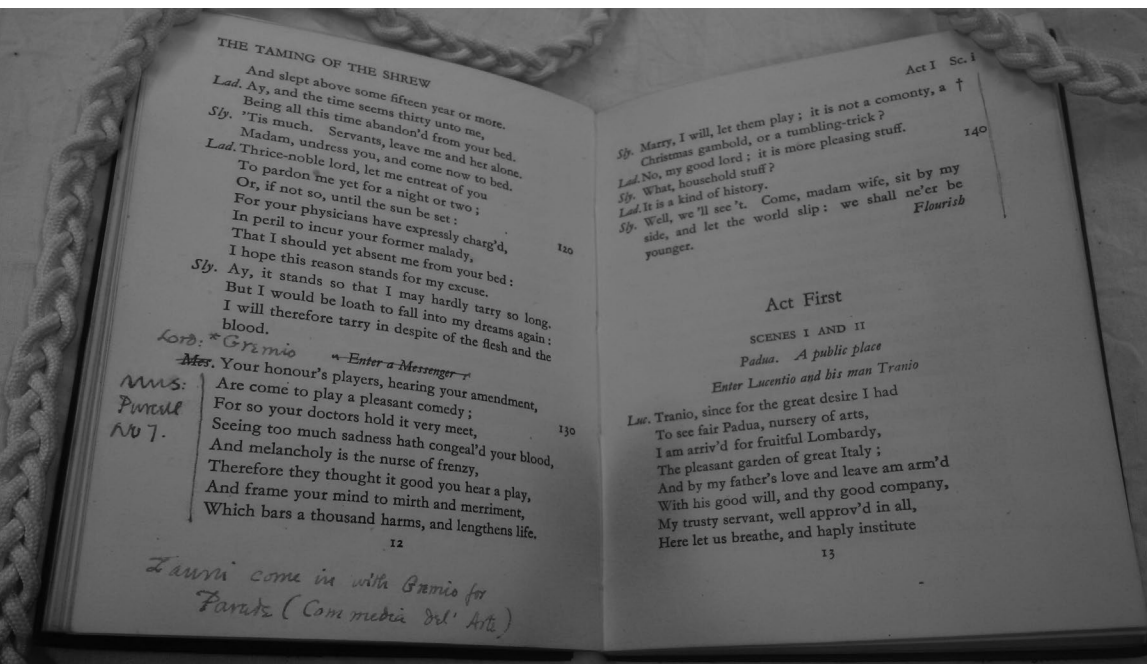
Davies fashioned Nofall's Pedant in a similarly hyperbolic vein, commenting in his notes that the "Pedant [is] v[ery]. funny," likely in his exchanges in Act four, Scene five with the jesting Petruchio (John Londerville) and Katherina (Brenda Davies), but that "Pedant needs more paunch" (Insert 3). Whether this "paunch" was required for the sake of verisimilitude—assuming Bullock to be stouter than Nofall—or alternatively to enhance the comic potential of the character as a Falstaffian opportunist, Nofall's Pedant appears to have assumed a commanding presence.

Davies's spouse Brenda played the title role—quite successfully, it would seem, as she won the prize for best individual performance at the Eastern Ontario Drama Festival in Brockville that year (Ness 12). Her shrew was something of a trickster: according to the marginalia, instead of striking Bianca (Maralin Munro) in Act two, Scene one, as the text's standard stage direction at line twenty-two indicates, Davies's Katherina "Frights her with [a] snake" (see image 4). This inventive alteration colours the dynamic between the two sisters, shifting the emphasis away from the domination and violence we see in other representations of this scene—as in Chris Abraham's 2015 Stratford Festival production, in which Deborah Hay's Katherina took scissors to the dress and hair of Sarah Afful's Bianca, and beat her—and toward a malicious cleverness. Davies's Katherina did lash out physically elsewhere, as the stage direction, "*She strikes him*" (2.1.217) remains intact during her

altercation with Londerville’s Petruchio; thus, her character was not opposed to violence, but rather preferred nasty pranks to punches, when possible.

In his director’s notes, Davies remarked, “B’s hops v[ery]. good—good yell on ‘bed’” (Insert 2). If “B” indeed referred to Brenda in this case—as is highly probable due to the notation’s placement chronologically, and the occurrence of the word “bed” (2.1.261) in Katherina’s first encounter with Petruchio—this comment indicates Davies’s success in harnessing her physical and vocal energies to generate laughter. Her “hops” likely implied some sort of injury—a stubbed toe, a twisted ankle—arising from her physical grappling with Londerville: his Petruchio does lament, “Why does the world report that Kate doth limp?” (247), supposedly reacting to her injury. Furthermore, Davies’s “yell on ‘bed’” seems to be her insightful and creative response of shock to Londerville’s assertion that he will keep himself warm “in [her] bed” (261). Her physical exuberance here, in combination with her outraged vocalization, render Davies’s shrew an energetic, outspoken character performed by a master of comic timing.

Opposite Davies’s Katherina, Londerville depicted “a holy terror” of a Petruchio, “shouting and brandishing a whip at Kate” (Smith, Beck, and McMaster 22). Here, again, director Davies improvised with an extra-textual gesture, humorous in its hyperbolic nature and yet perhaps slightly shocking in its intensity. EODF adjudicator Robert Speaight “warmly praised” Londerville’s energetic Petruchio, deeming it the runner-up for the best actor award (Rex 9). Londerville later went on to win the best actor award at the EODF for his role in PLT’s 1952 *Merry Wives of Windsor*, also directed by Davies (Smith, Beck, and McMaster 20).

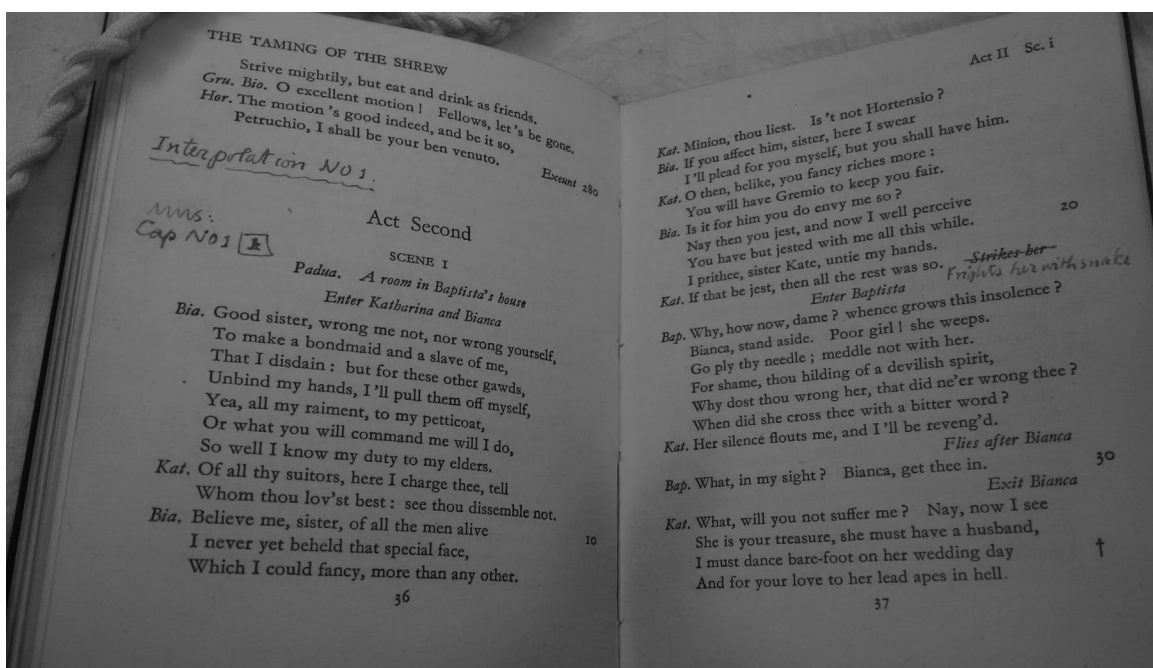


Img. 4. Marginalia. Courtesy of W. D. Jordan Rare Books and Special Collections, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario. Photographer: Cathleen McKague

There are other instances of physical comic subtlety in addition to those provided by Munro, Tourney, Noftall, Davies, and Londerville, although the actors responsible remain unnamed. For instance, the final notation that Davies made in his director's notes reads "Three neat nods" (Insert 3). This notation immediately follows the one in which Davies instructed Tourney to "turn up [his] collar"; thus, presumably it pertains to an action in the play after Biondello's gesture at 5.1.100. This gesture might be the satisfied farewell of Londerville's Petruchio to Lucentio (Nichols), Hortensio (Joseph Barnard), and Baptista (Gordon Cornell) at the play's finale—one nod given to each. Davies altered the lineation in the ending to supply Petruchio with the final words, moving Hortensio and Lucentio's lines before Petruchio's farewell:

Come, Kate, we'll to bed.
 We three are married, but you two are sped.
 'Twas I won the wager, though you hit the white;
 And, being a winner, God give you good night! (5.2.186-87)

Londerville may have nodded, saluting the others prior to his exit with Davies, after delivering these lines. Alternatively, this nodding could be the reaction of Londerville's Petruchio to the lengthy declamation of Davies's Katherina on the subject of female obedience. In the latter case, these nods may have been orchestrated to mitigate the potential discomfort that modern audiences might experience at the speech's debasement and



Img. 5. Marginalia. Courtesy of W. D. Jordan Rare Books and Special Collections, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Photographer: Cathleen McKague

subjection of the female sex. (Whether Katherina is serious when she recites this decree is another matter entirely!)

Another comic gesture of uncertain provenance is the “Drollery *with* arrow” that Davies indicates in Act one, Scene one upon the entrance of the Minola family and Bianca’s suitors. Though the instigator of this “drollery” remains unnamed, several possibilities exist: Munro’s Sly may once again have stolen the limelight from the sidelines, or perhaps Davies’s Katherina made a menace of herself, prodding her sister’s posturing suitors like a malevolent Cupid. Conversely, the zanni—figures upon whom I elaborate in the final sections of this article—may have been the instigators: Davies remarks that they “come in with Gremio for Parade” (Ind.2.128) at the end of the Induction, without specifying any exit for them (see image 5). It seems that they may have remained onstage, gamboling in the background: *Peterborough Examiner* reviewer T. J. Allen observed that “even the scene-shifters are made adjuncts to the humour of the play” (13).

It is not surprising or revolutionary to discover that Davies’s comedy was funny. What sets it apart is the cleverness and subtlety of its humour, and the skill and fluidity with which his actors seem to have absorbed and enacted his suggestions—perhaps, at times, improvising. This same subtle, physical humour re-emerges in Davies’s later writing, as when *Tempest-Tost*’s “practical joker” Geordie Shortreed uses “rubber snakes” (147) to fright his cast-mates, or when solemn pedant Hector Mackilwraith suffers mortifying gastric “screams and bagpipe flourishes” (227) on account of indigestion.

Detail and Historicity

Another facet of the production that these annotations reveal is its attention to detail. The actors’ gestures—sometimes as subtle as the flip of a collar—indicate a devotion to character and a sense that the stage business was fully motivated from within. Baptista’s (Gordon Cornell’s) “stroke,” which Davies commented was “v[ery]. good,” perhaps occurred at Petruchio’s entrance in outrageous nuptial attire, and is yet another humorous example of this phenomenon (Insert 2). Costuming and props expressed a similar level of commitment: in addition to requesting more paunch for the pedant, Davies bemoaned the inappropriateness of Cornell’s stockings, “Bap’s socks terrible” (Insert 2), and solicited “A little water in [the] gold basin” (Insert 1) in which, presumably, the Second Servingman encouraged Christopher Sly to wash his hands (Ind. 2.76). Clearly, the director bestowed great care in orchestrating a finely-tuned and believable production. It is understandable that the regional adjudicator, Robert Speaight, was quoted in Brockville as terming the rendition “a brilliant essay in Elizabethan stagecraft,” yet one in which “the players were not yet standing on their own feet, but on the feet of the director” (Ness 12).

One of the objectives of this astute attention to detail seems to be a drive toward historical accuracy. While Davies’s production did not advertise itself as adhering strictly to principles of Original Practice, it did boast an Elizabethan aesthetic in terms of costume and design, crafted and tended carefully by the director. Adjudicators and journalists alike perceived the production’s interest in historicity, as Speaight’s comment above and news-clippings indicate. Speaight was well-positioned to recognize an “essay in Elizabethan stagecraft,” as he had “worked a good deal with [innovator William] Poel,” originator of the

return to Elizabethan staging methods, “in his later years” at the Old Vic (Speaight, *Poel* 13). In 1950, one year after witnessing Davies’s production, Speaight began writing Poel’s centenary commemorative biography, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival* (1954) (Byrne 9). His perception of Davies’s *Shrew* as an “essay” indicates its purposed yet experimental bent. The production’s historicity emerges in journalistic reviews also, with *Peterborough Examiner* reviewer Allen remarking upon the authenticity of the “lavish costuming,” including “the plumes on the Renaissance head-gear” and “the buckles of the sabots” (13). Allen affirmed, “This production of ‘The Shrew’ is authentically Shakespearean in its emphasis on dress and colour” and its comparatively rather bare stage: “The sets are not elaborate; that is in keeping with the Elizabethan and best modern practice in Shakespeare productions” (13). Davies staged the Induction before a curtain, on the apron, and the remainder of the play as though in a Lord’s chamber. PLT hired Jack Hamer, an artist who had exhibited work in the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, to paint a screen, “a stage-within-a-stage three-panelled device which gives the Italianate atmosphere of Padua” (Allen 13), a simple backdrop whose reverse side indicated Petruchio’s abode. In light of this aesthetic, Davies’s tutting over “Don Munro’s wrist watch [and] glasses” in his notes seems to intimate his desire for historical authenticity—it is a directive to Munro to remove these personal items when on-stage, so as to be fully in-character and fully in-period (Insert 1).

The production’s music also demonstrated an interest in historicity, as it incorporated selections from baroque British royal composer Henry Purcell’s score for *The Old Bachelor* (1693), the first play written by William Congreve (see image 5). Purcell’s sprightly “Rondeau No 1,” for instance, introduced the Huntsmen in Scene 1 of the Induction. Although Purcell is not an exact contemporary of Shakespeare’s, he is early modern, and certainly “one of the greatest and most individual of English composers,” as Robert Thompson states in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (n.p.). Perhaps his music—played live by Musa Cox and Mary Baker—was the closest substitute Davies could access for Elizabethan musical settings. Davies also enlisted sections of twentieth century British composer Peter Warlock’s (Philip Arnold Heseltine’s) “Capriol Suite,” instrumental music inspired by Renaissance dances (See image 4).

Scrutiny of the play’s Appendix reveals that Davies decided to incorporate at least three passages from the anonymous *The Taming of a Shrew*, printed in the Appendix, into his production. The precise relationship between the much shorter and less poetic *A Shrew* (first printed in 1594) and Shakespeare’s *The Shrew* (first printed in the 1623 folio) has never been ascertained: several theories circulate, positioning *A Shrew* as a source text, an early draft of the play, a pirated “bad quarto,” or a deliberate revision of Shakespeare’s play (Miller 2-3; Wiggins 235). Despite *A Shrew*’s uncertain origins, Davies chose to interpolate one segment of *A Shrew* between Acts one and two; the second at 3.2.120; and the third following Vincentio’s line, “O monstrous villain!” (5.1.97) as he is being led to prison. Each of these interpolations features Sly (Munro) in conversation with the Lord (Robert Bolton), commenting upon the action of the play. The first and third interpolations are marked in the text with red ink as “*Interpolation No 1*” (see image 4) and “No 3: Interpolated,” while the second is unmarked but, as its position is indicated in the Appendix as 3.2.120, seems not to have required external signification.

The purpose of these additions appears to have been an attempt to recreate the play in what Davies assumed was its original entirety. Had Davies attributed these segments

to Shakespeare—indeed, “Many modern editors agree” that Shakespeare wrote them, according to the editor of *The New Cambridge A Shrew*, Stephen Roy Miller—Davies’s inclusion of them would have signified his desire to stage a production closer to those that Shakespeare’s original audiences would have experienced (3). Certainly, scholars have pondered the disappearance of Sly from the folio after his outburst at the end of Act one, Scene one, sometimes conjecturing this elision to be an authorial oversight, or alternatively a deliberate method of restraining the company’s overactive clown, Will Kemp (Williamson 119). By incorporating these additional scenes from *A Shrew*, Davies bolsters the coherence of the narrative structure while also engaging in historical restoration and recreation.

It might be worth noting that a second, older copy of the New Temple *The Taming of the Shrew* in the Robertson Davies Collection also appears to have incorporated supplemental material from *A Shrew* found in its Appendix. Red numbers beside five interpolations listed in the Appendix correspond with five prominent red numbers written into the margins of the text. This older version of the play seems to have been a performance copy as well, judging from stage directions such as “Laugh” (3.2.82) scrawled throughout and thumb-prints along the bottom of the centre seam. It appears as though this earlier text, printed in 1934, may have served as Davies’s performance copy from his time as an actor at the Old Vic in 1939. There is evidence that other actors at the Old Vic were using New Temple Shakespeare copies as performance texts at this time: Brenda Davies’s annotated 1934 copy of *As You Like It*, inscribed on the flyleaf with “The Old Vic. September 1936,” indicates that she used it in her role as Rosalind (as understudy to Edith Evans, perhaps?) in her first year as a student at the Old Vic. If the earlier New Temple *Shrew* was Robertson’s performance text from his apprenticeship, then by incorporating three of the Old Vic’s five additions into his own version of the play, Davies was emulating directorial practices of eminent theatrical director Tyrone Guthrie as a student would a master. He admired Guthrie deeply, asserting in 1953 that many consider him “the greatest living director of Shakespeare” (“The Director” 38). In imitating Guthrie, perhaps he was also consciously or unconsciously imbuing his production with an element of British prestige.

Incorporation of the Sly material from *A Shrew* was an innovative practice in the 1940s. Prior to Guthrie’s adoption of this practice, Sir John Martin-Henry (advised by Poel) had introduced some of this material in his 1913 production of *The Shrew* at the Prince of Wales Theatre in London, as had Harcourt Williams at Sadler’s Wells in 1931 (Miller 47-49). Nevertheless, it was not a directorial custom to do so. These additions reflected the burgeoning interest in recapturing Elizabethan performance conventions—an interest in which Davies seems to partake.

The colonial nature of Davies’s taste may have also manifested in the enunciation he sought from his actors. Two of his director’s notes seem to have critiqued actors’ pronunciations, which solicits the question of whether the production employed English accents. Davies coached Joseph Barnard’s Hortensio, “Joe not ‘toon,” while he remarked that Les Woodruff’s Tranio either vocalized or needed to vocalize “wawl” (Insert 2). If not “toon,” then presumably “tune” was the desired pronunciation for Barnard, replacing the Central Ontarian vowel sound with a more English enunciation in Hortensio’s lines to Bianca, “You’ll leave his lecture when I am in tune?” (3.1.24); “Madam, my instrument’s in tune” (37); and “Madam, ’tis now in tune” (45). Woodruff’s “wawl” could have referred either to

Tranio's "well" in the line, "That 'only' came well in" (2.1.357); or alternatively to his "walls" in "Within rich Pisa walls, as any one / Old Signor Gremio has in Padua" (361-62). It is unclear whether Davies encouraged or discouraged Woodruff's pronunciation of either word as "wawl"; either way, an English pronunciation seems to be present. Thus, enunciation emerges as an important concern of the production—specifically, British-English rather than Canadian-English enunciation.²

A final dash of historical flavouring surfaced in the production's *commedia dell'arte* touches. Davies made repeated references to zanni (played by John Armstrong, Hugh Hutchinson, Edward Loveday, and Donald McKnight) throughout the play: "No zannis for Pets entrance" (Insert 1), "zanies & furniture" (Insert 3), "Zanni come in with Gremio for Parade" (Marginalia 12), "v[ery]. good finger work by zany" (Insert 3), and the sartorial query, "Red drawers for zany?" (Insert 3). These zanni are stock *commedia dell'arte* comic figures, often clever servants. As the Italian *commedia* art form spread in prevalence and popularity across Europe in the sixteenth century—including Shakespeare's England—its presence in Davies's production reinforces his interest in historical specificity (Worthen 402). Davies's "acrobatic" zanni "changed the scenery" (Grant, *Man* 309), thereby functioning as stagehands. According to Kay Rex of the *Peterborough Examiner*, Speaight "gave special praise to the group of Zanies who played a vital part in the production" (9) at the EODF. These supernumeraries infused life and extratextual stage business into the play, much as the *commedia* zanni would have done.

Davies seems to have imported this style, and the zanni, from director Tyrone Guthrie's 1939 production of *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Old Vic Repertory Theatre, a production with a similar device in which Davies had acted five parts: Curtis, a zany, the Pedant, the Widow, and Sly as understudy at some matinées (Grant, *Man* 208; Stone-Blackburn 8). Critics termed Guthrie's *Shrew* "a roaring knockabout Italian harlequinade, decked out with all the Commedia del 'Arte paraphernalia [sic]" involving "custard-pies and yards of sticky dough" (Williamson 118). It is worth noting that Davies was serving as an advisor to Guthrie at the Old Vic; thus, the *commedia* styling accomplished by designer Roger Furse may not have been conceptualized by Guthrie, but instead by Davies (Stone-Blackburn 8; Williams 140). Nevertheless, the fact remains that Davies replicated this tactic from the earlier British production, in effect re-creating the performance conditions of the Old Vic's 1939 *Shrew*.

Of course, a deeply scholastic production committed to absolute textual historicity would have incorporated music from Italian Renaissance composers rather than British ones. It would have featured Italian Renaissance fashions rather than Elizabethan versions, and English accents would have given way to Italian intonations. The production Davies staged seems to have been more interested in nostalgic emulation of the performance conditions of Shakespeare's era than those dictated by the diegesis. Like Guthrie, whose production boasted "Caroline sumptuousness" ("Taming," *New Statesman* 494) and a rapid delivery approximating that of the Elizabethan stage (Roberts 132; Brown 13; "Taming," *The Stage* 10), Davies was concerned with historicity. His production's blend of sixteenth-century British and Italian influences recreates the kind of drama early modern audiences would have encountered: a drama infused with anachronisms, spoken in English (though an English dissimilar to the modern "received pronunciation") despite its setting in a foreign

land. Davies's *Shrew* seems to gesture toward the Original Practice theatre so popular in the early twenty-first century—nudged, very likely, by Guthrie's 1939 production's similar stylistic take at the Old Vic.

Amateur Excellence: The Mentorship Model in Action

Taken all together, the production's overall aesthetic, music, pronunciation, and infusion with *commedia* elements evoked an early modern ambiance with specifically English overtones. Certainly Davies—wearing his scholar's cap—was interested in exploring historicity in this endeavour. It also seems that he was attempting to legitimate the concerted efforts of his troupe of amateur thespians by engaging with a colonial “masterpiece” in a faithful manner. In *Love and Whisky: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival*, Betty Lee remarks that Canadian amateur theatrical groups from the mid-1930s onward demonstrated a reliance on “the colonial tradition” for this reason (291). Davies's selection of play and interpretation indeed served to legitimate, restricting the potential “Canadian-ness” of his performers, including but certainly not limited to their natural speaking voices.³ This, too, in a climate that sought to foster the growth of a specifically Canadian theatre: Lord Bessborough, the founder of the Dominion Drama Festival, had asserted that DDF's “ultimate objective” was the creation of “a national drama” in Canada, a professional theatre originating in Canada rather than elsewhere (Lee 96).

What is unusual about the reception of this production is its perceived “originality.” The regional adjudicator Speaight determined it “an original rendering of Shakespeare,” contrasting it to the “conventional, though correct, production of Noël Coward” out of Regina that it had scandalously ousted from competition in the DDF (*The Property Basket* 303). Indeed, during its rehearsal period the *Peterborough Examiner's* reviewer Allen remarked upon its novelty, affirming, “Probably no theatrical performance in Peterborough has had a more colourful and fresher staging” (13). How is it that a production so heavily imbued with historical influences and references could be considered “original” or “fresh?” The best answer at which I can arrive is that Davies's *Shrew*, despite its commitment to historicity, seemed original because of its willingness to experiment with the text as it is written. Its clever use of extra-textual gesture and vocalization emphasized interiority and individuality—an observation revealed by the annotations and amendments that I have discovered. We see similar “liberties” taken with Shakespeare's texts by prominent companies on the twenty-first century stage, as when Tom Rooney as Tranio and Gordon S. Miller as Biondello conversed using pasta names in Abraham's 2015 *Shrew* at the Stratford Festival. Guthrie, too, had been considered an educated innovator whose productions exhibited a “spirited but irreverent attitude to Shakespeare” and a “lively sense of fun” (Roberts 132-34) which Davies seems to be imitating. In Canada, staging had often been rather uniform in the first half of the twentieth century, as theatrical companies operating at this time frequently purchased pre-blocked scripts from the American publisher Samuel French, Inc., which homogenized performances (McNicoll 11; Mann and Southgate 273). Clearly, Davies's staging broke free from this tradition.

Whatever the case, Peterborough Little Theatre's production garnered critical acclaim both locally and nationally. At the EODF in Brockville on February nineteenth, 1949, it

placed second to Davies's own drama *Fortune My Foe*, produced by Ottawa's Capital City acting troupe, in the award for best full-length play. Apparently, regional adjudicator Speaight "just threw away his pencil" after witnessing Davies's *Shrew* and ran onstage in his exuberance to congratulate the company (Grant, *Man* 309). In this elimination competition, Davies's *Shrew* advanced to the DDF final exclusively on Speaight's recommendations: had it been a less ambitious and impressive venture, it would not have advanced.

Nevertheless, the production was granted the honour of occupying the final slot of the final day in the DDF roster of performances, being staged at 8:30 pm on April thirtieth at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto. There it won the Louis Jovet trophy for best direction. Davies's direction seems to be a point on which many critics remark: even as early as February, reviewers such as the *Globe and Mail's* Margaret Ness had recognized Davies's skill by terming his production a "brilliantly produced classic" (12). Davies had not only produced and directed his *Shrew*, but had also acted a "bit part" in the production, that of Tailor: British DDF adjudicator Philip Hope-Wallace expressed jocular mystification at the "great gust of applause" (Mann and Southgate 283) that greeted Davies in this relatively minor role, while the DDF's official photographer John Steele remarks wryly in a caption to a photograph of the costumed Davies as Tailor kneeling before his wife as Katherina, "The beard is not make-up" (21). Perhaps his desire to shape the production resulted in his active performance in it.

Involvement in the DDF was in itself a high honour. In his special study on the state of the theatre for the nation-wide "Massey Report" (the *Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences*) of 1949-1951, Davies was later to term the DDF "one of Canada's cultural glories," although he lamented that "Canada characteristically does not know it" (376). British DDF adjudicator Hope-Wallace, critic of the *Manchester Guardian* (now known simply as the *Guardian*), similarly affirmed in 1949: "There's nothing like this [festival] in Britain, or the United States, or anywhere. Nothing with the breadth and importance and quality in amateur theatricals. Don't Canadians realize this?" (Dempsey 10). The DDF exhibited the work of Canada's most accomplished amateur theatrical practitioners, and the calibre of such performances not only rivalled those of professional companies, but also inspired confidence in the feasibility of a professional "national drama." As Davies asserts, "Our Dominion Drama Festival proves to us every year that there is the raw material of a professional theatre in Canada which might rise to very great heights" ("The Theatre" 380). Davies's own *Shrew* participated in the prestige of this competition, as well as its invigoration of the Canadian theatrical scene.

Davies's performance text sheds new light on the intricacies of his 1949 production of *The Shrew*. His was a detail-oriented, lighthearted rendering of Shakespeare's play rife with early modern influences of the visual, audio, textual, and thematic persuasion. It seems to exhibit a tension between tradition and inventiveness emulative of Guthrie's work, and in doing so diverges from standardized, script-bound staging practices prevalent in Canada at the time. Davies's text provides a window into the dynamic and excellent work being done by amateur theatre troupes prior to the establishment of professional centres of drama in Canada, such as the Stratford Festival in 1953 and the National Theatre School in 1960. Indeed, the professionalization of Canada's theatre may not have been possible without what Speaight termed the "exceptionally high" standard of performance in Canadian amateur theatre, as

the elevated calibre of amateur drama at this time encouraged Canada's most accomplished actors to remain in Canada (The Dominion Drama Festival 2). Only four of the sixty-five original Stratford Festival actors were not Canadian by birth or by training (McNicoll 4). In fact, future Festival actor William Hutt had competed against Davies's *Shrew* at the 1949 DDF as Benjamin Hubbard from Lillian Hellman's *Another Part of the Forest*, performing with the Toronto troupe, The Players' Workshop (The Dominion Drama Festival 18).

Incidentally, Davies himself served as a member of the Board of Governors and public supporter of the Stratford Festival in the years to come. According to biographer Judith Skelton Grant, he

sat on the Stratford Festival's Board of Governors from 1953 to 1971; wrote articles for the souvenir programs of 1954, 1957, and 1962; gave papers at the Stratford seminars in 1960, 1962, and 1968; contributed to *The Stratford Scene 1958-1968*; and reviewed many of the plays for *Saturday Night* and the *Peterborough Examiner*. (Robertson Davies 20)

Alongside founding Festival director Tyrone Guthrie and theatrical artist Grant MacDonald, Davies published *Renown at Stratford: A Record of the Shakespeare Festival in Canada* (1953), a documentation of the early days of the Festival, as well as its two successive publications, *Twice Have the Trumpets Sounded* (1954) and *Thrice the Brinded Cat Hath Mew'd* (1955). In the preface to *Renown* he boasts that the Festival was "the most ambitious and successful venture in the Canadian Theatre that we have yet seen" (vii). His involvement in Canada's premier amateur dramatic scene prior to the Festival's launch in 1953—a scene in which his 1949 *Shrew* took part—no doubt qualified and prepared him to assist in the founding of the Festival, as well as his nearly two decades of service to it.

Not only does this artifact enrich the historical record of Canada's twentieth-century amateur drama, it also illuminates Davies's first novel. *Tempest-Tost*, "the finest record of the amateur theatrical experience" (Mann and Southgate 284), contains specific connections to Davies's 1949 performance decisions and director's notes. The narrative's setting is Salterton, a fictional locale that seems to meld Davies's experiences in Peterborough and Kingston. Salterton Little Theatre's acting space "prominently" displays "two framed certificates testifying that the Little Theatre had distinguished itself in the Dominion Drama Festival" (*Tempest-Tost* 96), mirroring PLT's 1949 DDF success. During SLT's auditions for *The Tempest*, Professor Vambrace of Waverley University recommends using "the New Temple edition" (102) of the play, the very same that Davies had used when directing PLT's *Shrew*. Davies had also assisted Maurice Roy Ridley in his creation of the New Temple series while studying at Oxford in the 1930s (Stone-Blackburn 7), and so his predilection toward these play-texts is understandable, as is that of *Tempest-Tost*'s academic figurehead, Vambrace. SLT musical director Humphrey Cobbler insists upon using pieces by the "nice, simple Genius" (172) Purcell instead of set music for the production, just as Davies had done for PLT's *Shrew*. In addition, the narrator mentions "the Italian Comedy," or *commedia dell'arte*, and its *lazzi*, "special monologues, or acrobatic feats, or passages of mime" (148), jesting that stodgy maths teacher Hector Mackilwraith's *lazzo* is a stale joke about time. The *commedia* stylings of PLT's *Shrew* emerge here satirically, yet demonstrate Davies's familiarity with the tradition.

At points in *Tempest-Tost*, Davies even recycles specific notes that he had given Don Munro: in her final “director’s harangue to the cast” following the dress rehearsal, professional director Valentine Rich admonishes Geordie Shortreed to “be very careful” about wearing his “wrist-watch” onstage, and reminds Professor Vambrace to avoid wearing his “spectacles in the vision scene” (240). Director Rich also “revealed to the world, and to Mr. Leaky himself, that Mr. Leaky could be quite funny if he didn’t try to be his very funniest” (140–41), just as Davies had remarked in his *Shrew* notes, “Don not trying so hard—better” (Insert 1). The wry humour that Davies’s notes evince (“Bap’s socks terrible”), as well as that evident throughout his production, re-surfaces in *Tempest-Tost*, as when the narrator comments, “Valentine realized, more sharply than Nellie ever knew, that Salterton was not New York” (146).

Furthermore, Davies replicates his own directorial record-keeping practices, providing SLT’s assistant director Solly Bridgetower with a copy of *The Tempest* in which he had already made a great many notes, and which was fat with bits of paper which he had thrust into it here and there, with what he believed to be good ideas for the production scribbled on them (127) very similar to the artifact under investigation here. He also seems to draw upon the *Shrew*’s performance outcomes: Davies’s narrator laments the amateur actors’ “diffident, flat, half-choked” (103) line-reading, perhaps gesturing toward the vocal deficiencies DDF adjudicator Philip Hope-Wallace had noted in PLT’s production (Karr 31). *Tempest-Tost* therefore demonstrates the synergistic relationship between Davies’s theatre involvement and his non-dramatic literature—a relationship that deserves more sustained attention for its ability to elucidate Davies’s process, products, and potentially even his personal experiences.

Although he uses it as the basis for gentle satire in *Tempest-Tost*, Davies was aware of the excellence of Canadian amateur theatre. In his special study for the Massey Report, he remarks, “if it flourished on such a scale, proportionately, in the U.S.A., news of the prodigy would have been spread to the uttermost ends of the earth” (376). Whether his appreciation of amateur dramatics had always been high, or whether his exposure to the very best of it on account of his competition in the 1949 DDF improved that appreciation, remains unknown. One wonders if Davies realized, as he jotted director’s notes into his performance text of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the degree to which amateur productions such as his showcased the skill and creativity of Canada’s best actors and directors, and nurtured confidence in the country’s ability to sustain a national theatre.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Curator Alvan Bregman, Special Collections Librarian Jillian Sparks, and other W. D. Jordan Special Collections and Music Library staff for their assistance with my research.
- 2 Davies himself spoke with an English accent. Whether this accent was natural (his father was Welsh with Scottish heritage, though, not English; his mother was Canadian-born of Scottish and Pennsylvanian German heritage) or feigned is a matter of conjecture. Rumours circulated at Massey College that he had adopted the accent following his time abroad.

- 3 Of course, “Canadian-ness” is a contestable term, as Canada is a country comprised of a multiplicity of cultures. Canada’s indigenous populations demonstrate diversity in lifestyle, customs, and beliefs, as do all subsequent settlers.

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