

Prologue

Theatre, Theatricality and the Public in Early Modern England

If intercourse in civill commerce may conduce to form the Judgement, compose the mind, or rectify the manners (as none who hath receiv'd impression thereof, can deny) no form of institution humane reason can reflect upon, more suddenly and more perfectly can attain thereto, than can the well composed illustrations of a *Theater*.

Leonard Willan, Preface to *Orgula, or the Fatall Error* (1658)

This is a book about theatricality and the public in early modern England. It is based on two assumptions: that there is such a thing as early modern theatricality, and that during the seventeenth century, a public sphere developed in England that encompassed large sections of the populace. In this book, I trace the trajectory of both phenomena over the course of a century – and propose that it is in fact impossible to understand one without the other. Theatricality and the public sphere have long been buzzwords in studies of the early modern period. The two concepts, however, are seldom engaged together. Theatricality remains largely within the domain of theatre and literary studies, where it became prominent in the 1980s with the rise of New Historicism, while the concept of the public sphere has attracted most interest among post-revisionist historians since the 1990s. Furthermore, a strange watershed seems to divide interest in both concepts: studies of the early modern public sphere often begin with the steep increase of publications in the early 1640s, when tensions between Parliament and King Charles I mounted, and focus on the subsequent Interregnum period that encompassed the civil wars and the ensuing Republican and Protectorate regimes. This, however, is precisely the point where most studies on the early modern theatre stop – because in 1642, Parliament issued a prohibition of plays that remained largely intact until the restoration of monarchy in 1660. The history of English theatre is thus characterised by a strange caesura, at the very moment when transformations of the early modern public started to unfold. If the 1640s and 1650s are an exciting period to historians, when a vibrant public sphere emerged amidst

the political struggles of the Interregnum, theatre and literary scholars often consider these decades a period of decline after the great theatrical age of Shakespeare and Jonson. As a result, those who study the theatre and those who study the public sphere of the revolutionary seventeenth century seem to have little to say to each other. The aim of this book, then, is to forge a conversation between those fields and show that they have, in fact, a lot to talk about.

My project in this study is to trace the shared trajectory of theatricality and the early modern public from the Reformation in the 1530s to the end of the Interregnum period in 1660. Over the course of this century, I aim to explore the constitutive relationship between theatre, theatricality and an early modern public. In doing so, the book pays particular attention to the years from 1642 to 1660, when theatre was officially prohibited. As my discussion attends to those missing years in the history of the English theatre, it challenges two widely held beliefs about the Interregnum. Among historians, the emergence of a permanent public sphere in England is commonly attributed to print, namely the flurry of political pamphlets and newsbooks that followed the breakdown of press censorship on the eve of the civil wars. And among theatre scholars, the prohibition of theatre in 1642 is often tacitly assumed to have precluded theatrical debates and almost all performances until the Restoration. I counter both of these views by demonstrating that the prohibition actually encouraged engagement with dramatic writing and performance throughout the Interregnum. Far from being obliterated by prohibition, theatre continued to exist, and its practitioners actively explored new forms, started new ventures and resourcefully adapted to and circumvented the ban. As some historians of the Revolution have shown, performances of plays continued, albeit surreptitiously, new performance genres evolved and plays continued to be written. More importantly, theatricality continued to inform modes of political representation and debate, and to occupy the imagination of news-writers, poets, polemicists, political thinkers and philosophers. Above all, discourses circulating during the Interregnum sustained an engagement, begun in the preceding decades, with theatricality's role in addressing the people, and accordingly its potential role in the formation of early modern publics.

Even if debate persists as to whether the events of mid-seventeenth century England can properly be called a Revolution, the Interregnum period witnessed unprecedented political conflict and regime change, including the execution of a king by Parliament. Most importantly, it saw the common people who, as Queen Elizabeth's secretary of state maintained in 1583, had "no voice nor authoritie in our commen wealth", assume both

voice and authority in the political realm and evolve as a popular public that needed to be addressed.¹ Post-revisionist historians have framed this increasing political importance of the people in terms of an emergent public sphere, in which political opponents, religious groups and actors from all social levels sought to engage a broad public. To make this claim, these historians regularly focus on the role of print in this early modern public sphere, understanding the public in terms of readership. In contrast, I will provide a number of case studies that highlight the importance of theatre as a model for public address before and during the Interregnum. As competing authorities vied for public support, theatre provided strategies to address the public and was even reimagined by some as an essential institution for the new commonwealth. Leonard Willan's preface to his play *Orgula, or the Fatall Error* (1658), quoted earlier, is a case in point. In spite of the fact that theatres had officially been closed for sixteen years, Willan's preface provided a defence of theatrical performance as an essential means of civil education and political union. To Willan, theatre was the perfect tool to facilitate the public discourse that had developed by this time, to train judgement and to "inform with delight the meanest members of the civill frame in what [the sovereign] is concerned".² Theatre's potential to address a large and diverse public, he argued, extended also to "gracefull entertainments in Society" such as processions, festivities or civic shows. For Willan, such theatrical events effectively shaped a "generall Union" of the people as they invited their audience to see themselves as citizens of a Commonwealth.

In this book, I take up Willan's suggestion that theatre could be an effective means of addressing the people, both through theatrical performance and through "entertainments in Society" beyond the theatre stage. I argue that such public performances on and off the stage were crucial in shaping the early modern public, and that the development of this public had an impact on theatre in turn. During the Interregnum, when theatre became enmeshed in public discourse and political tensions, many poets and political philosophers in fact took this as an opportunity to rethink the role of theatre as a political medium. The ongoing prohibition and the scarcity of actual theatre performance provided them with a blank slate, as it were, from which to reimagine theatre as a public institution in the service of the state. Others, however, tried to resist this politicisation of theatre and aimed to sustain precisely the complexity and excess of theatre that

¹ Smith (1583), 33. On popular early modern culture see Burke (1994).

² Willan (1658), arv. For related contemporary arguments in France see Kolesch (2006), 139–46.

made it an incalculable means of address. Both trends played out during the Interregnum, under the pressures of prohibition and political change. And both were informed by practices and discourses that had developed since the professionalisation of theatre and the sporadic public addresses of the post-Reformation public sphere in the sixteenth century. Rather than emphasising the break of 1642, then, this book attends to the continuous development of theatre and theatricality from the thriving theatre culture of Elizabethan and Early Stuart England through the Interregnum. Following the trajectory of theatre and theatricality through a time of prolonged prohibition, I argue that theatre was absolutely vital to the public sphere that emerged during this period, and even to our evolving notion of the public sphere writ large.

Literature, Revolution and Early Modern Publics

That theatre performances did not end with the 1642 prohibition has been proven as early as the 1920s, when Leslie Hotson, Hyder E. Rollins and Thornton S. Graves published pioneering studies of theatre during the Interregnum that documented surreptitious performances of plays throughout the period, as well as the performances mounted by William Davenant with the consent of the government in the late Protectorate.³ But it took decades before interest in the theatre of the Interregnum resurfaced, and when it did it was with a focus on drama. Dale Randall's *Winter Fruit*, a comprehensive survey of the remarkable range and variety of Interregnum dramatic literature, was published as literary historians began to appreciate the role of literature in the social and political upheavals of the period.⁴ Lois Potter, in her study of Royalist style, and David Norbrook, in his discussion on republican writing, both emphasised the continuity of literary traditions during the Interregnum, as well as their development and transformation under the changing political circumstances.⁵ Literary historians turned to the period with an interest to, as Thomas Corns put it, "repoliticize" its writings: to place them in their contemporary political context and trace the ways in which literature itself shaped that context.⁶ Attention to the many ways in which literature responded to the tumultuous changes of the 1640s and 1650s has culminated in Nigel Smith's observation that if there was indeed a revolution, it registered most strongly in the realm of literature, which saw the development of new forms, the rise of journalism

³ See Graves (1921); Rollins (1921, 1923); Hotson (1928). On Davenant see also Edmond (1987); Clare (1994, 2002).

⁴ See Randall (1995). ⁵ See Potter (1989); Norbrook (2000). ⁶ Corns (1992), 1.

and the politicisation of printed works for an ever widening audience. This view is shared by the editors of the *Oxford Handbook of Literature and the English Revolution*, the publication of which itself has signalled a renewed interest in Interregnum literature.⁷

In the wake of this trend, scholars have also turned to the period's dramatic literature and have attended to stylistic innovation, politicisation and the place of drama in a widening print market. More recent handbook articles, notably by Janet Clare, note the formal innovations of Davenant (as well as his strategic appeals to the Protectorate government) and discuss the political pamphlet plays of the period which used dramatic form to convey news, criticism and ideology to a popular readership.⁸ The role of dramatic writing in the "Pamphlet Wars" of the 1640s and the political shifts after the regicide in 1649 have attracted particular attention, from Susan Wiseman's study of the political content and context of the period's dramatic literature to Elizabeth Sauer's exploration of the migration of the "theatrical mode" into print and Rachel Willie's discussion of the ways in which drama negotiated political changes beyond the Restoration.⁹ And as literary historians rediscovered the importance of the period's literature as a forum to reflect and address political issues, they found that polemicists and pamphleteers often employed dramatic writing in order to address a new audience: the people at large, which emerged as a political force in the conflicts of the seventeenth century.¹⁰

The mounting conflict between Charles I and his parliamentary opposition in the 1640s indeed saw the unprecedented involvement in politics of the English people at large, particularly in London. Tens of thousands of ordinary people signed petitions, participated in demonstrations and consumed the news-books and pamphlets that reported and discussed political matters. Historians have long struggled with this new role of the common people as a political force. Marxist historians, most notably Christopher Hill, have emphasised the social conflict and increasing popular opposition to religious and political authorities in a "world turned upside down",

⁷ See Smith (1994); Knoppers (2012). On the debated question whether the civil wars and the ensuing Republic and Protectorate constituted a revolution in the political realm see Knoppers (2012), 4–7.

⁸ See Clare (2004, 2012). ⁹ See Wiseman (1998); Sauer (2005); Willie (2015).

¹⁰ Many major works focus on literature and rhetoric in relation to politics, such as Skerpan-Wheeler (1992); Achinstein (1994); Norbrook (2000); Worden (2007). Other studies attend to a range of media, including performance, but restrict themselves to specific periods within the interregnum, such as Kelsey (1997); Sherwood (1997); Holberton (2008). Sauer (2005) explicitly discusses the influence of theatre on Interregnum writing, and Knoppers (2000) provides a remarkable study of the representation of Cromwell through different media and by different actors. Lately, Kevin Sharpe has broken new ground with his three-volume history of political representation that spans the period from the early sixteenth to late seventeenth century; see Sharpe (2009, 2010, 2013).

while revisionist historians insisted that a wide-ranging consensus prevailed in the decades before the civil wars, when the political elites appeared untroubled about popular opposition.¹¹ In the late 1980s, post-revisionist historians who were interested in the involvement of the people in political debate sought to overcome the divide between conflict and consensus, and between ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ perspectives. And to do so, they could take their cue from a text whose English translation, published in 1989, proved a timely intervention: Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.¹² In his study of the bourgeois public of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Habermas put forth the notion of the public sphere as the realm in which a critical public was addressed and actively debated political matters in public, forming and articulating opinions and effectively contesting the authority of the state. Habermas argued that such public debate was facilitated by a number of institutions such as salons and coffee houses, but also, most importantly, by an independent press. Conceptualising the public largely as a community of readers, Habermas characterised public debate as inclusive, allowing participation “without regard to all pre-existing social and political rank”, and characterised by rationality.¹³ Although these claims have been exhaustively criticised, Habermas’s theory has nevertheless been highly instructive to historians of the seventeenth century.¹⁴ A public sphere perspective that focusses on public debate and the relation of state authority to the public allowed for a discussion of the tumultuous decades preceding and following the civil war in terms other than conflict or consensus. Post-revisionism thus attended to the shift that occurred during the seventeenth century as a public hitherto only passively addressed by the state began to assume a voice of its own, debate political issues and articulate a public opinion that engaged the state, held it accountable and challenged its political monopoly. Whereas a sense of ownership of the state was before restricted to a small elite, it gradually extended as large sections of the populace took part in political debates, including the lower orders of society such as small shopkeepers,

¹¹ See especially Hill (1972, 1974). For a compact discussion of the different historiographical approaches see Peacey (2013), 6–14. For criticism of such broad narratives that disregard the local circumstances for revolts and other articulations of popular will see Walter (2006).

¹² The book had appeared in German as early as 1962, but it was only with the publication of the English translation and an accompanying conference that resulted in the publication of a volume of critical essays, edited by Craig Calhoun, that Habermas’s concept of the public sphere received wide recognition among British and American scholars. See Calhoun (1992); Habermas (1991).

¹³ Habermas (1991), 54.

¹⁴ Habermas’s theory, particularly his emphasis on equality and rationality, has been criticised from a number of angles; see particularly Fraser (1990) and the essays in Crossley and Roberts (2004).

day-labourers and apprentices.¹⁵ And while not all addresses to the people invited critical engagement, and often rather sought to manipulate and control them, the period witnessed a “spread of political consciousness” precisely because the lower strata of society were increasingly included in addresses to ‘the people’.¹⁶

Peter Lake and Stephen Pincus have described this transformation as a shift from a post-Reformation public sphere, which emerged during the Reformation in the early sixteenth century and lasted until the 1640s, to a post-revolutionary public sphere, which began to take shape in the 1640s and 1650s and was fully developed by the late seventeenth century. They suggest that the post-Reformation public sphere of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century was in fact a “series of public spheres”, constituted by temporary attempts to stir public opinion in the pursuit of religious or political objectives.¹⁷ These short-lived publics intended to put pressure on the authorities rather than to incite long-term debate. They were called into being through pamphlets published by Protestants, Catholics or Puritans in opposition to the regime, but also through campaigns of courtiers and political leaders.¹⁸ Addressed “during moments of perceived crisis or emergency”, these were publics “of sorts” that nevertheless suggested the possibility of critical public debate:

A variety of media – print, the pulpit, performance, circulating manuscript – was used to address promiscuously uncontrollable, socially heterogeneous, in some sense ‘popular’ audiences. Such activity implied the existence of – indeed, notionally at least called into being – an adjudicating public or publics able to judge or determine the truth of the matter in hand on the basis of the information and argument placed before them.¹⁹

Lake and Pincus situate the transition from post-Reformation to post-revolutionary public sphere at the outbreak of the civil wars, when debate about political issues and news of war events became widely available through print media like news-books and petitions after the breakdown of censorship in 1641. Over the course of the civil wars, discussion of religious and political matters increased in scope and involved a broad public on a regular basis. And as this public emerged as a permanent addressee,

¹⁵ See Baldwin (2000), 200. ¹⁶ Burke (1994), 259. ¹⁷ Lake and Pincus (2007b), 3.

¹⁸ See Lake and Pincus (2007b), 5. The fact that publics not only emerged in opposition to established authorities, but were also strategically evoked and instrumentalised by members of the regime qualifies a Habermasian understanding of publics as emancipatory and democratic. For discussions of the instrumental nature of publics in the early modern period see Hammer (2007); Lake (2007); Doty (2010).

¹⁹ Lake and Pincus (2007b), 6.

attitudes towards it changed: “while participants in the post-Reformation public spheres considered political communication to be a necessary evil, by the end of our period many (though by no means all) political actors understood relatively unfettered public discussion to be normatively desirable”.²⁰

The early modern period thus saw its own structural transformation of the public sphere, facilitated by changing political circumstances and conflict. The public that emerged was shaped by the concrete ways in which a number of individual actors – statesmen, officials, artists, writers and speakers – addressed it. Throughout the period, these actors participated in what Michael Warner has called the “poetic world-making” of public discourse.²¹ Publics, Warner claims, are called into existence by being addressed: from this vantage point, the countless early modern pamphlets, proclamations and performances were not addressed at a public that already existed, but themselves turned their readers and audiences into a public. Each mode of address invited engagement and judgement, and provided those that responded to it with self-awareness and terms of expression. Warner’s concept of public-making has had a strong influence on the study of early modern publics. Understanding publics to be subject to strategic evocation, historical circumstances and processes of change, numerous scholars have attended to the material practices of public-making and the impact of works of art on the formation of early modern publics.²² As Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin note in their introduction to *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe*, this expanded field of study challenges monolithic notions of an early modern public:

An analysis of early modern works of art and intellect and the fields of activity that grew up around them suggests, however, that the formative work of public making is far less unified and uniform than has been thought and also that forms of public expression, identity, and action include poetry, play and performance (to mention only a few forms) as well as rational debate.²³

This approach provides a necessary complement to Lake and Pincus’s structural perspective for two reasons. On the one hand, it attends to the concrete practices of public-making, emphasising agency and the underlying strategic interests of such practices. On the other hand, it engages the heterogeneity of the early modern public sphere, accommodating the plurality

²⁰ Lake and Pincus (2007b), 20. ²¹ Warner (2002), 82.

²² See the numerous projects within the Making Publics network on www.makingpublics.org as well as Wilson and Yachnin (2010a).

²³ Wilson and Yachnin (2010b), 6.

of potentially overlapping or oppositional publics. The early modern public sphere was just as heterogeneous and conflicted as society itself, which was stratified along parameters of political allegiance, religion, gender, class, race, income, education and urbanisation. In this society, different interest groups developed their own mode of address in search of an audience, constituting different publics – be they the King publishing an order, women marching through town to protest against taxation, or a bishop preaching at Paul’s Cross. The early modern public sphere thus consisted of numerous publics, including oppositional or segregated ones – the multiple “subaltern counterpublics” that Nancy Fraser, in an early critique of Habermas, has identified as constitutive of the “public-at-large”.²⁴

The early modern public sphere that developed over the course of the seventeenth century, then, was vibrantly dynamic and made up of different, often competing publics evoked through different practices. In their search for broad engagement and support, however, most practices aimed for an address that was as wide as possible and were directed, at least potentially, at what Fraser calls the “public-at-large”. Yachnin and Wilson observe that early modern publics competed “for the attention and approval of ‘the public,’ a totality that is conjured into existence on the strength of each public’s address to ‘the world’ and each one’s aspiration toward growth”.²⁵ Most texts, images and performances accordingly addressed themselves generally to ‘the people’. Even though their actual audience was limited, they were directed at a public that potentially comprised all of the English populace. Royalists and Republicans, Laudians and Puritans, Levellers and reformers all addressed the people at large and thus sustained the idea of a single, overarching public the support of which they wanted to enlist. The point of an approach that attends to the making of publics, then, is also to understand ways in which individual practices of address shaped the role and idea of the public at large. Rather than focussing on structural changes, such as lifting of censorship or political conflict, this approach suggests that we can arrive at a notion of the early modern public and its impact on society by looking at the concrete practices that constituted individual publics while appealing to the public at large.

While a number of studies have engaged the ways that an early modern public was addressed, however, most have limited their scope to print as the medium of address. This is true for studies of the early modern period as a whole, such as those by Alexandra Halasz, David Zaret or Joad Raymond, as well as for those that focus on the changes in the mid-seventeenth

²⁴ Fraser (1990), 68.

²⁵ Wilson and Yachnin (2010b), 6.

century.²⁶ This approach is plausible, given the impact of the printing press in the sixteenth century and the proliferation of printed tracts and news-books during the civil wars, when censorship of the press had effectively broken down.²⁷ And of course printed works and other texts also make up the majority of sources with which we as historians can approach the early modern period in the first place. But to understand the early modern public only in relation to texts significantly limits our understanding of that public. For one, such a perspective largely excludes the illiterate majority of the population that was not the immediate addressee of printed texts. David Zaret acknowledges this point, and uses it to caution against idealisation of the public as democratic and all-encompassing:

Debate in the early-modern public sphere often invokes “the people” and involves persons drawn from remarkably diverse social backgrounds. But participants in those debates – even broadly constructed as speakers, hearers, writers, publishers, printers, readers – represent only a subset of “the people”. For the most part . . . , participation in the nascent public sphere in early-modern England depended on access to unequally distributed literary and economic resources that facilitated participation in print culture.²⁸

The problematic limits and silent exclusions of a general idea of “the people” as audience concerned many writers of the period. Milton is a prominent example for an author’s complicated relationship to the public and his ongoing struggle with the question of who should actually be included in the community of “the people” that were his intended audience.²⁹ But while it is important to be aware of the limits and silent exclusions of the early modern public, we should also be careful not to limit our own perspective on the public sphere to those who could access printed works, as Zaret seems to suggest. Early modern thinkers were in fact well aware of the problem of unequal access and illiteracy and were trying to overcome it specifically by turning to other media than printed texts. Leonard Willan, in his preface, acknowledged the necessity to reach illiterate and uneducated people, and he promoted theatre as a means to convey information specifically to “the illiterate and orebusied multitude: who usually want vacancy or capacity to peruse, conceive, or retain the sence thereof under the tedious, abstruse forms of publique manifests”.³⁰ Print was not the only way of addressing a public, and frequently, different media were used amidst efforts to reach particular audiences. Activists printed notices

²⁶ See Halasz (1997); Zaret (2000); Raymond (2003). On the period of the Civil Wars and the ensuing years see Holstun (1992); Achinstein (1994); Smith (1994); Raymond (1999); Norbrook (2000).

²⁷ See the introduction in Holstun (1992), 1–13; also see Raymond (2003).

²⁸ Zaret (2000), 33. ²⁹ See Corns (1992); Hammond (2014). ³⁰ Willan (1658), *iv*.

to coordinate and mobilise participation in demonstrations. Pamphleteers broke down the arguments of learned treatises for popular readers. Performances such as royal entries, sermons or executions were disseminated in print, thus expanding their audience. And often enough, texts themselves became oral performances as they were read out to illiterate audiences.

Studies that focus on the impact of print on the early modern public, including much of the work on Interregnum drama, miss some of that public's most essential aspects. Other than the bourgeois public envisioned by Habermas, which he saw as a public of readers engaging in rational debate, the early modern public has to be understood also as one of spectators and unruly participants whose engagement was just as passionate as it was rational. This public was not addressed exclusively, or even primarily, by means of print, but also through practices such as rumour, slander and casual conversations at fairs and in marketplaces. Events such as processions, tumult in the streets, sermons and the reading of proclamations informed public opinion. And performances by ballad singers, clowns and players effectively involved audiences in a collective experience that was crucial to the self-consciousness of the early modern public. Such address preceded the pamphlet wars of the 1640s, and there was a long tradition of rituals, subversion and tumult for the articulation of popular opinion.³¹ The public that emerged out of these varied practices did not adhere to a distinction between 'popular' and 'elite', but was as diverse and heterogeneous as the means by which it was addressed.³² To partake in that public involved somatic experience as well as rational engagement, emotional appeal as well as critical judgement.³³ It is imperative then to expand the field of analysis to include other, popular media and their role in the emergence of an early modern public. Through the study of performances, images and oral culture alongside texts we can recover a fuller understanding of the early modern public – a public that we have to model not just on literate readers, but on the audience of the period's most popular medium: the theatre.

Early Modern Theatricality

If any medium could rival print in terms of its in early modern England, it was the theatre. From guild plays in provincial towns and interludes

³¹ See Cressy (2000); Walter (2006). On popular resistance to Parliament's agenda of reform in the 1650s by means of subversive performance see Capp (2012).

³² See Burke (1994).

³³ See Rospocher (2012), 25. Also see Staines (2004); Knights (2007). For an attempt to discuss theatre as a public medium see Yachnin (2010a, 2010b).

presented by travelling players to shows at the London theatres or court performances, theatre worked to address all sections of society. It provided popular entertainment and reflected – directly or indirectly – contemporary events and debates. It spoke to sovereigns and apprentices, to both learned and illiterate audiences. And even if you had never been to the theatre, you could learn about it in sermons, pamphlets, ballads and personal reports. Playwrights, clergymen, politicians and pamphleteers discussed the dangers and benefits of theatre in print. Poets and preachers used theatrical metaphors. And contemporary events were often compared to theatre, or to the plots of individual plays. On a daily basis, theatre was extremely successful at addressing large audiences.

It is not surprising, then, that literary and theatre historians have been intrigued by the theatricality of the early modern period – the ways in which theatre reflected the society of which it was a part, and the ways in which it impacted that society. The concept of theatricality became particularly prominent in New Historicism, with its focus on theatre's embeddedness in discourse and in networks of power. Theatricality here appeared as one of "power's essential modes", a force that was both affirmative and potentially subversive.³⁴ The term provided a frame to discuss theatre in correlation with discourses and practices in the social realm, such as the entries and progresses of Elizabeth I, the splendour of Stuart masques and the elaborate practices of self-fashioning of a newly emerging subjectivity. Yet the New Historicist approach to theatricality, though important in its (ongoing) exploration of the mutual imbrication of theatre and society, is limited by three main shortcomings. For one, New Historicism tends to focus on the spectacular. While it has fruitfully discussed phenomena such as the royal entry, the rebellious mob or the public execution, more mundane forms of theatricality have drawn less attention. Modes of address such as the preaching of sermons or reporting in news-books were less extraordinary, but they formed an integral and important part of everyday experience that contemporaries discussed in theatrical terms. A similar point can be made regarding the literary works engaged by New Historicist scholars. While their discourse-oriented approach has led them to include textual sources such as court records, philosophical works, letters, diary entries and cheap pamphlets, their discussion tends to lead back to the canon of great literary works, most notably Shakespeare. Periods that lack these great writers, such as the 1630s and 1640s, and particularly the Interregnum, have remained largely unexplored by New Historicism.

³⁴ Greenblatt (1988), 46.

Secondly, New Historicist interest in the relation of plays to broader cultural discourses has led to a focus on content and discursive formation. It has, consequently, privileged the text itself over the material realities of its production, dissemination and audience experience. This focus on discourse also leads to a third shortcoming: the fact that the power of theatricality in New Historicism appears massive, but also circular. While theatricality accommodates both affirmation and subversion, its ultimate mode appears to be containment, facilitating the “circulation of social energy” in an endless feedback loop.³⁵ New Historicism thus has difficulties accounting for change, such as the radical upheaval and political turmoil of the civil wars and Interregnum.

Recently, attempts have been made to rethink the New Historicist approach to theatricality. The contributors of a handbook on *Early Modern Theatricality* focus specifically on the material practices of early modern theatre, providing a wide range of essays on individual aspects of theatre, all of which engage its medium-specific qualities. From the spatial setting of stages and the economic status of actors to the temporality of performance and the use of role-play in a social context, the volume aims, in the words of its editor Henry S. Turner, for an “exploded view’ of early modern theatricality” that isolates aspects of theatrical practice and considers them in detail.³⁶ As such, the volume is representative of a broader trend in early modern scholarship, informed by historical phenomenology and the cognitive sciences, towards the materiality of performance. Spearheaded by the works of Robert Weimann, a process of “rematerializing” the early modern theatre has fruitfully explored the traditions, conventions and conditions under which theatre operated, and by which the audience made sense of what they saw on stage.³⁷ In the course of this shift, attention has turned to the emotional dimensions of performance, which relied on a set of shared theatrical conventions, and on theatre’s material corporeality.³⁸ Recent studies have highlighted the affective dynamics that singled out the early modern theatre as an effective means of addressing an audience.³⁹ Situating theatre within a discourse of rhetoric and the passions, these studies have emphasised the distinctly communicative and social nature of the passions that were raised in the early modern theatre.

³⁵ See Greenblatt (1988), 3–20. ³⁶ Turner (2013), 3.

³⁷ See, in particular, Weimann (1988, 2000) as well as Weimann and Bruster (2008). Weimann’s work has been taken up in a number of works, notably the essays in Reynolds and West (2005). An excellent perspective uniting the different sub-sets of theatrical materialities, including the performance conventions that governed audience perception, is provided in Lin (2012).

³⁸ See Paster (2004); Pollard (2005); Döring (2006); Steggle (2007); Craik and Pollard (2013a).

³⁹ See, for example, Lopez (2003); Myhill and Low (2011a); Craik and Pollard (2013b); Hobgood (2014).

Interestingly, this contemporary emphasis on the emotional experience of audiences returns to some of the core issues of the early modern debates on the theatre. During the period, critics and defenders of the theatre believed in its extraordinary power to stir strong emotions – to ‘move the passions’ – in an audience. This experience, both parties claimed, was at once pleasurable and violent, and invested the theatre with an uncanny ability to compel specific reactions. If theatre was considered to be highly effective in stirring particular passions, however, it was anything but fail-proof. Far from being sure that audiences would react as expected, theatre professionals operated under constant risk that spectators would prove passive, unpredictable or unruly. Recent work on the early modern passions has significantly deepened our understanding of these complex dynamics in the theatre of the period. Yet until now, no study has addressed the ways in which this communicative and social power (and its problematic incalculability) was translated back into the social realm, and impacted the emergent early modern public. There seems to be an understandable hesitation to flatten distinctions and postulate yet another grand scheme, post New Historicism, in which theatre permeated all of society. Yet as a result, we are often left with works that honour the specificity of their subject, but restrict themselves to a very limited perspective. The handbook on *Early Modern Theatricality*, too, is symptomatic of this trend as its “exploded view” shies away from systematising a notion of theatricality. While the individual essays are certainly instructive, their alleged subject seems to elude them somehow: one cannot help but wonder if (and in what follows, I indeed argue that) early modern theatricality was more than just the sum of its parts.

In this study, I propose to reconsider theatre and theatricality’s role in early modern society in relation to the emergent public of the period. I am interested in the role that contemporaries ascribed to theatre in the “making” of publics, and in the impact of theatre on the material practices with which acts of public-making were realised. Taking into account recent insight regarding the importance of passions in the early modern theatre and the complex agency of theatre audiences, I systematically explore the ways in which these aspects also shaped a *theatrical* early modern public. From this perspective, I focus on connections between theatrical traditions and practice, discourses of rhetoric and the passions, and the political and social developments of the period. Early modern theatricality, I will argue, should be understood as a set of discourses and practices that served as the connecting tissue between these elements. As a concept, then, theatricality

navigates two constitutive relations: that between theatre and society, and that between actor and audience.

On the one hand, theatricality negotiates between the conventions of theatre and those practices in society at large that bear a structural or metaphorical relation to theatre – what Turner, in his introduction, calls “non-theatrical theatricality”.⁴⁰ As theatre historian Rudolf Münz has noted, this relationship is always specific to a particular historical period and also includes opposition to theatre and such excessive theatrical traditions as clowning, mumming and carnival.⁴¹ Rather than speaking of theatricality in the singular, one would thus have to account for a plurality of theatricalities.⁴² If Lord Mayor shows were an aspect of early modern theatricality, so were the skilful impersonations of Burbage, the diatribes by anti-theatrical writers, and the antic jigs of stage clowns. Emphasising the constant interplay between different types of theatricality, Münz notes that their relationship might not always be acknowledged by contemporaries and might even be actively concealed – an observation that resonates with Lyotard’s poignant definition: “To Hide, to Show: that is theatricality [sic]”.⁴³ To fully address the range and impact of theatricality in a period, we thus face the challenging task of accounting for its manifold manifestation – even in places that might seem odd, or where its influence was expressly disavowed.

On the other hand, theatricality is always characterised by the relation between performer and audience, and can thus be regarded both as a mode of behaviour (focussing on the ‘actor’) and as a mode of perception (focussing on the ‘spectator’).⁴⁴ In her seminal study, *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life*, Elizabeth Burns emphasises the importance of perception for theatricality to argue for its historical and cultural specificity:

Behaviour can be described as ‘theatrical’ only by those who know what drama is, even if their knowledge is limited to the theatre of their own country and period. It is an audience term just as the *θέατρον* was originally a

⁴⁰ Turner (2013), 14. On the history of the term see Fischer-Lichte (1995); Davis and Postlewait (2003). Christopher Wild, for example, uses theatricality to refer to “those aspects of theatre that are specific to it as a medium” (Wild (2003), 59 n.; unless specified otherwise, all translations from German works are my own).

⁴¹ Münz’s approach remains an instructive suggestion rather than a consistent methodology. It was sketched out in a number of essays that appeared posthumously in Münz (1998). See particularly *ibid.*, 71–6.

⁴² See Münz (1998), 77–80; the point is also made in Féral (2002), 107.

⁴³ Lyotard (1976), 105; see Münz (1998), 70. ⁴⁴ See Féral (2002).

place for viewing, an audience place. Behaviour is not therefore theatrical because it is of a certain kind but because the observer recognises certain patterns and sequences which are analogous to those with which he is familiar in the theatre.⁴⁵

Relying on an analogy between quotidian behaviour and behaviour on the stage, Burns argues, theatricality is contingent on the particular type of theatre to which the observer can relate, based on her own experience: only an audience schooled in theatrical conventions could identify theatricality in the “socially real world”.⁴⁶ Such an approach to theatricality emphasises questions of agency. While theatrical behaviour was often “devised to transmit beliefs, attitudes and feelings of a kind that the ‘composer’ wishes us to have”, Burns suggests that theatrical competence allowed observers to approach such behaviour critically instead of passively subjecting to it.⁴⁷ Theatricality thus becomes more than a top-down instrument in the interest of power, as it often appears in New Historicism. Instead, it relies on the audience’s gaze and involves the use of conventions that can be learned, examined and employed by everyone. In this light, theatre itself becomes important as the place where such competence can be trained – and as a crucial institution for the development of a politically self-conscious public.

In the past, however, there have been only few systematic attempts to discuss theatricality in relation to the public sphere. Three methodological approaches to theatrical publics, however, merit brief discussion. In a seminal essay on theatricality and the public sphere, Helmar Schramm proposes to explore the relation between theatre and the public within three “archaeological search fields” in which the theatre appears as *metaphoric model*, as *rhetoric medium* and as *fine art*.⁴⁸ Schramm engages each field with reference to a different historical period from the early modern period to the nineteenth century. In each context, Schramm finds that a notion of theatre served as a reference point for theatricality, as “theatrical strategies of efficacy, tested and refined in the experimental realm of ‘art’, [were] adapted to entirely different realms of public life”.⁴⁹ Schramm stakes his claim in the public sphere debates by linking the emergence of a public sphere in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to parallel transformations in theatre,

⁴⁵ Burns (1972), 12. ⁴⁶ See Burns (1972), 8–21.

⁴⁷ Burns (1972), 34, 33. It seems as if agency for Burns is bound to explicit awareness of one’s role as audience in a theatrical situation. I would object, however, that the strength of an analytical frame of theatricality depends on the possibility to take into account the constitutive, active role of the audience in theatrical events (including their agency and possible responsibility) even if the event is not explicitly recognised as theatrical (see, for example, Warstat 2005).

⁴⁸ Schramm (1990), 204. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

as political authorities sought to enlist the rhetorical efficacy of theatricality as a “soft violence” to cultivate and restrain a bourgeois public.⁵⁰ And as theatre was increasingly framed as artistic experience and fine art at the turn of the nineteenth century, theatre censorship paralleled the censorship of public discourse.⁵¹ Schramm’s discussion thus provides a history of different theatricalities in relation to the public sphere. His methodology is based on the premise that theatricality can be accessed only indirectly by examining the role of theatre as an element of discourse: direct or metaphorical references to theatre would indicate the correspondences that could be constructed between (a historically specific) theatre and “theatrical sides of social life”.⁵² Although his essay takes an extremely broad perspective, Schramm’s approach allows him to identify a variety of relevant discourses on education, arts and politics from which a shared trajectory of theatricality and the public sphere can be reconstructed. While Schramm does not attend to the synchronicity of different theatricalities, nor analyse specific sites and concrete practices, his essay, which he himself calls a “pre-study”, demonstrates the constitutive relations between theatricality and the public, and informs my own approach.

More recently, two books have engaged the shifting historical relation between theatre and the public with closer attention to individual sites. Both David Wiles’s *Theatre and Citizenship: The History of a Practice* (2011) and Christopher Balme’s *The Theatrical Public Sphere* (2014) aim for a broad historical trajectory, from ancient Athens to contemporary modern performance. But their approaches are notably different. Wiles is interested in the role of theatre in promoting and constituting citizenship, understood as a sense of ownership of the *res publica* and of belonging to a community.⁵³ Basing his notion of citizenship on Aristotle’s idea of “co-spectatorship”, Wiles ties the practice of citizenship to the practice of theatre, considering the public sphere as the realm in which both practices converge.⁵⁴ Balme, on the other hand, makes a point of distinguishing between the co-spectators attending a theatre performance and the public at large that engages with the theatre.⁵⁵ He focusses his study on the latter: theatre to Balme is not so much what shapes a community (or public), but what becomes the issue of public debate. With regard to the early modern period, Wiles is thus interested in the ways in which theatre addressed spectators as members of a nation, while Balme focusses on the ways in which the emergence of a professional early modern theatre encouraged the

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 221. ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 218–27. ⁵² *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵³ See Wiles (2011), 8. ⁵⁴ Wiles (2011), 15, 208. ⁵⁵ Balme (2014), 14.

(anti-)theatrical debates of the period. Both approaches are highly instructive and complement each other, but they also suggest further avenues for engagement. As Wiles focusses on theatre practice, he pays less attention to the impact of theatre on other modes of public address, and to the contemporary debates over theatre that made its role in fostering citizenship more complex. Balme's focus on theatre as an issue of public debate, on the other hand, needs to be supplemented by a study of the ways in which theatre itself facilitated public discourse and shaped the public sphere in which it was debated. Though Balme stresses the need for a "more multifaceted understanding of the public sphere, one that includes the discursive potential of the Habermasian theory but is augmented by agonistic and ludic dimensions",⁵⁶ his own idea of the public sphere remains conventional, as he analyses public debates about theatre that are largely carried out in print. As a result, his interest in theatre as an issue of debate mainly restricts him to moments when theatre becomes contentious, such as anti-theatrical attacks or theatre scandals, limiting theatre's public impact to scandal and outrage.

It is interesting to note, however, that Balme extends his chapter on the early modern theatre into the 1640s, including the 1642 prohibition and a brief discussion of the years following it. Wiles, too, attends briefly to this period, in particular to Milton's idea of using theatre to articulate a new sense of citizenship, reconciling civic republicanism with the idea of the political nation.⁵⁷ While the very nature of their projects as broad historical overviews prevents Wiles and Balme from engaging the Interregnum in depth, they signal that the period is important for a discussion of theatricality and the public. In doing so, they resist a prominent logic in theatre studies – what Münz has identified as the "obvious and in principle logical idea of a theatre historiography as a history of achievement, based on works of art, to simply leave out times/societies/representatives that had little or nothing to do with theatre".⁵⁸ Münz rightly observes that this seemingly obvious disregard for periods without theatre is problematic, because the strong anti-theatrical positions during these periods were often based on an intense engagement with theatricality.⁵⁹ Münz's apparently paradoxical suggestion is that to learn about theatricality, we should turn first and foremost to theatre's opponents who often have the most developed understanding of the medium, its capacities, effects and potential dangers. Rather than disregarding periods without theatre, we should thus examine

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, II. ⁵⁷ Wiles (2011), chapter 4, 'From Coventry to London'.

⁵⁸ Münz (1998), 98. ⁵⁹ See Münz (1998), 98.

the rationale behind this absence, and the ideas of theatre that informed opposition and prohibition. To acknowledge the constitutive role of oppositional discourses in the history of theatre and theatricality, however, is not to trace an overarching “anti-theatrical prejudice”.⁶⁰ Differentiating between censorship, hostility to the theatre and anti-theatricality, authors such as Huston Diehl, Martin Puchner and Christopher Wild have demonstrated how the specific reasons that motivated opposition to the stage in a particular historic context can be examined and how the impact of such opposition on theatre and on notions of theatricality can be explored.⁶¹ These studies provide the context for my own study, which shares their readiness to

understand this relation [between theatre and its opposition] as a symbiotic and productive one, in which contrary positions are indissolubly intertwined, and mutually determined. Once their confrontation is no longer understood as prohibitive and debilitating, the complex interferences and exchange processes that have shaped and transformed the medium of theatre during its long history become visible.⁶²

In the course of such engagement with oppositional discourses, paradoxical constellations emerge. Christopher Wild proposes that theatre itself can be anti-theatrical when it internalises its enemies’ critique, and that the process of theatre reform can be understood as an attempt to cleanse theatre itself from theatricality.⁶³ Similarly, Turner proposes a “non-theatrical theatricality” – a theatricality that moves outside of the theatre (as institution, or art) into other realms, where it would appear as “theatricality that is no longer theatre”.⁶⁴ Theatricality without theatre, theatre without theatricality – we have returned, it seems, to a moment of constitutive tension at the heart of the concept, where the tension between theatre and a theatricality beyond the stage can be pushed to the point where one appears to exist without the other.⁶⁵ Such a perspective, however, is deceiving. Though theatricality might disassociate itself from the theatre, it remains nevertheless shaped by it. And theatricality continues to haunt even a theatre that attempts to leave it behind. Together with anti-theatrical opposition and critique, theatre and theatricality are intertwined precisely in the complex relation that constitutes a period’s specific theatricality. To map

⁶⁰ Barish (1981).

⁶¹ See Diehl (1997); Puchner (2002); Wild (2003). Other nuanced studies of anti-theatricality and opposition to the theatre in specific periods include Kolesch (2006) and Primavesi (2008); see also Kotte (1995).

⁶² Dieckmann, Wild and Brandstetter (2012), 8. ⁶³ See Wild (2003), 237–62, esp. 260–1.

⁶⁴ Féral (2002), 95. ⁶⁵ See also Davis and Postlewait (2003), 3.

out the theatricality that informed the emerging early modern public, I will thus focus on a time during which these paradoxical relationships unfolded and in which theatricality without theatre, and theatre without theatricality developed in relation to an equally dynamic public – the Interregnum from 1642 to 1660.

I argue that theatre continued to develop even in the apparent absence of performance, and that theatricality was essential to the Interregnum public. It informed political discourse, as well as such practices as parliamentary processions, triumphal entries of generals, diplomatic protocol, news-book reporting, religious debating and political satire. It is the aim of this book to consider both the role of theatricality in the emergence of an Interregnum public and the ways in which this emerging public influenced notions of theatricality and attitudes towards the theatre. During these eighteen years, stakes were raised significantly. Armed conflict, the erosion of traditional authority and the emergence of a public that participated in political discourse challenged political and social stability, and provided possibilities for rethinking society. At the same time, prohibition, raids and continued attacks put pressure on theatre to assert itself as a public medium and adapt to political change. It was at this time of crisis that the constitutive relationship between theatricality and the early modern public played out most forcefully. The importance of theatre for the emerging public thus shows itself most clearly at the very moment when theatre seems to disappear.

Method and Structure of This Book

As this volume covers more than a century in the eventful history of the English theatre, and as it seeks to engage a number of exemplary sites, my choice of sites and materials has been wide-ranging and selective at once. Charting the relationship of theatricality and the public, I examine plays and records directly related to theatrical practice, but also pamphlets, news-books, political and religious tracts, letters, diary entries, legal records, rhetoric manuals, broadsides, frontispieces and woodcut illustrations. I analyse these sources with an interest both in early modern discourses of theatricality and the public, and in the material practices of theatre and of public address. While my study relies largely on textual sources, I use these materials to recover the role of theatre and theatrical address and challenge a text-based understanding of the early modern public in terms of readers. On the one hand, I use textual sources such as news-book reports, playtexts or letters to reconstruct and analyse early modern

performances and theatrical practice, in the vein of historical performance analysis and the trend to “re-materialize” the study of the early modern period. On the other hand, I also approach my sources from a discourse-oriented cultural studies perspective to trace the way that theatrical practice informed modes of thinking, debate and public address. With this twofold approach, I aim to provide a thick description of the mutual imbrication of a professionalised theatre and an emergent public in both practice and discourse. My point, however, is not to replace a Habermasian notion of the public sphere with a new paradigm of a theatrical public, but to emphasise the variety and intermediality of public discourse. When attending to performance and theatrical strategies, I will thus also consider the role of texts and the print market for their importance in disseminating, debating and contesting performances in the public sphere. I argue that print and theatricality related to each other in a complex interplay, where performances were orchestrated, reported and disseminated by means of print, where theatre traditions informed styles of writing, and where texts influenced the way people perceived and reacted to theatricality.⁶⁶ The main focus of this book will be on London, where theatres formed an integral part of the cultural landscape, and where the political struggles of the seventeenth century played out most forcefully. Yet the public that emerged during this period potentially encompassed the entire nation as civil war carried politics into all parts of the country, and theatrical strategies were directed at a wide audience throughout the realm. Accordingly, I will include in my discussion selected performances that took place outside London and even abroad. I have chosen my sites so as to portray the wide range of such strategies of addressing the public in late sixteenth and seventeenth century England.

Before laying out the structure of this book, a few notes on terminology are in order. Looking at the ways that a popular public evolved in relation to different theatrical addresses, I will use ‘public’ in the singular as a generic term. This does not mean to suggest that there was just one single or uniform public, but simply that the type of address I am interested in was, at least potentially, open to the public at large. I thus use the term in Warner’s sense of the potential addressee of an open communicative strategy that invites active responses – responses that could be rational as well as emotional. In a similar way, I use ‘the people’ to refer to the addressee of texts, images or performances that were aimed at a large audience,

⁶⁶ For the interrelatedness of different media also see Peacey (2013) and especially Burke (1994).

including the common people and potentially the nation as a whole.⁶⁷ In reality, this inclusiveness had its limits. When employed by early modern authors, the concept of 'the people' or the 'public' was usually restricted to English men, or even those who owned property. It implied various exclusions on grounds of gender, race, belief, class, literacy, education and age, exclusions that motivated the emergence of various counterpublics.⁶⁸ The aim of this study, however, is not to fully chart the various early modern publics, but to consider the characteristics of a public that was called into being and shaped by theatrical modes of address. I claim that such address was of the utmost importance to the way that publics were made during the period, and thus crucial to the way we understand the early modern public at large. I have also resorted to using the term 'authorities' as a stand-in for the intersecting apparatuses of court, councillors, magistrates, clerks, officers and justices of the peace who were essential in supporting the regime and enforcing its policies. Unless specified otherwise, 'authorities' refers to the institutions that were interested in and responsible for social stability and the support of governmental and ecclesiastical structures, even if these institutions changed as Republic and Protectorate succeeded the Stuart monarchy. Lastly, I use 'contemporary' to refer to the early modern period, while I use 'modern' as the slightly awkward, but practical indicator for practices and discourses that share contemporaneity with my twenty-first century readers and myself.

To reconstruct the shared trajectory of theatre, theatricality and an early modern public from the sixteenth century to the Restoration, this book is divided into four chapters. In Chapter 1, "Styles of the Stage", I examine the ways in which theatricality and types of public address informed each other in a post-Reformation public sphere that extended from the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century. My discussion is informed by two questions: What did people think about theatre and how did their idea of theatre inform practices in the social realm? To answer these questions, I reconstruct the early modern notion that theatre was able to powerfully affect its audience by appealing to their passions, a notion developed in debates that encompassed traditions of rhetoric, discourse of the passions and the senses and political theory. I go on to demonstrate that this notion of theatrical efficacy encouraged attempts to use theatrical styles of address in the social realm and look at three exemplary sites to chart a

⁶⁷ Some performances, such as diplomatic protocol, royal processions or public acts of iconoclasm, were explicitly addressed at an audience that included people beyond the English nation, such as rulers or religious groups on the Continent.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Cressy (2000); McDowell (2003); Wiseman (2006).

range of such theatrical styles. The accession of James I provides an opportunity to examine theatrical strategies of representation as well as concerns over the efficacy of regal style, while debates over Church ceremonies attest to the influence of theatre on reformed service and preaching practices. And the notorious and highly popular Martin Marprelate tracts show how theatrical efficacy could be translated into writing. Throughout, my discussion emphasises the crucial ambivalence of theatrical strategies: Although they aimed at ensuring obedience or eliciting very specific responses, they could also incite unexpected forms of engagement and debate, and were vulnerable to unpredictable audience reactions. The chapter thus illuminates the position of theatre audiences between subjection and disruption that informed complex and sometimes contradictory attitudes towards the emergent public as orderly ‘people’ and unruly ‘multitude’.

Tensions between an emancipated public of “people” and fears of an uncontrollable “multitude” mounted during the years leading up to the civil wars. Chapter 2, “From Audience to Public”, focusses on this period of political turmoil, during which large sections of the populace, especially in London, became increasingly involved in public affairs. I chart this development and argue that theatre furthered citizens’ self-awareness as members of a critical public, especially by appealing to their judgement and authority in prologues and epilogues. Outside the theatre, too, people claimed authority as they gathered for mass events like public trials and demonstrations to voice their support or their disagreement. Looking at selected events, such as the Star Chamber trial of Prynne, Burton and Bastwick and their subsequent triumphant return, this chapter shows the importance of such performances and of their underlying theatrical strategies for the emergence of a (post)revolutionary public sphere during these years. It argues that we have to understand this public as characterised not exclusively, or even predominantly, by reasoning and rational debate, but also by physical and emotional involvement, and by collective action and response. Theatrical means of address were characterised by a potential excess of passion and meaning. Whether directed at a theatre audience or a public, and whether aiming for critical engagement or obedience, any performance was vulnerable to failure, re-appropriation or subversion. There was always a risk that things could get out of control: a perfectly reasonable public could be overwhelmed by passion, and a seemingly mindless mob could begin to engage in critical debate. To comprehend the impact of theatricality on the early modern public is therefore to acknowledge that public’s potential unruliness. Building on this acknowledgement, the chapter concludes with a discussion of Parliament’s 1642 prohibition of plays.

I argue that the prohibition was not so much the climax of an on-going campaign against the theatre, but a temporary safeguard against theatre's ability to call unruly publics into being.

The second half of this book focusses specifically on the Interregnum period. The third chapter, "Public Performances", charts the development of theatricality as a means of addressing a public during the changing political circumstances of the civil wars, the Republic and the Protectorate. I show that the Interregnum was far from anti-theatrical, and that theatricality was in fact constantly employed and adapted in different political and ideological contexts, with each new regime attempting to develop a distinct theatrical style. The first section, "Playing to the People", examines the role of public performances, counter-performances and their reception by all sides amidst a climate of contestation and competition for public support during the civil wars. In a second section, "Theatres of State", I look at the ways in which theatre itself was envisioned as a political institution. During the short-lived Republic after the execution of Charles I, a number of political thinkers proposed the idea of state theatres as institutions necessary to address the public. I reconstruct these different proposals and contrast their underlying assumptions about the role of theatre as a means of education or containment. The unruly public that had emerged during the civil wars, however, was not easily contained or even addressed successfully. The third section, "Rehearsing Order", thus considers the different theatrical strategies employed by the Republic and the subsequent Protectorate and shows that, by the end of the period, Protectorate rulers attempted to use theatricality as a means of controlling the people and effectively stifling critical debate. Throughout this third chapter, I demonstrate how theatre influenced political discourse and inspired republican and monarchist thinkers alike. While plays were officially prohibited, theatre continued to inform the ways in which an emergent public was addressed.

Chapter 4, "Playing with Prohibition", complements the discussion of theatre's impact on the public as I now examine the ways in which the changing political circumstances and the prolonged prohibition in turn affected theatrical debates and practices during the Interregnum. The chapter takes on the seemingly paradoxical methodological challenge to write theatre history for a period in which theatre was allegedly non-existent. To do so, I also turn to sources that may appear tangential. Ordinances, petitions, cheap pamphlets, legal records and woodcuts all testify directly or indirectly to the hold of theatre on the public imagination, and to the persistent impact of theatrical traditions. The prohibition did not put an end to theatre, but shaped the continuous development of theatrical

discourse and practices. Again, the chapter is divided into three sections that follow the chronology of Chapter 3. “The Contested Stage” discusses the use made of the 1642 prohibition in political discourse, and the resistance by theatre practitioners that struggled to reclaim theatrical discourse from political interests. The second section, “The Theatre of Carnal Copulation”, reads a number of pamphlet plays that employ explicit sexuality as a response to the harsher prohibition of 1648, and as a defiant way of sustaining and reflecting the sensuous appeal of theatre. In a third section, “Circumvention by Constraint”, I look at theatrical enterprises during the Interregnum and at the campaign that led to the restitution of a ‘reformed theatre’ in the late 1650s. I argue, however, that this theatrical reform was not a triumphant liberation from prohibition, but should be understood as a rigid containment of theatre’s variety and potential excess, and as an attempt to stifle theatre’s potential for effective public address. The chapter shows that the prohibition occasioned intense debates on the styles, qualities and public function of theatre and in fact ensured theatre’s continued relevance and development throughout the Interregnum. An epilogue traces some repercussions of the relationship between theatricality and the Interregnum public after the Restoration in 1660.

* * *

This book sets out to accomplish two things. Its first objective is to recover the Interregnum for the history of theatre. Taking on a period in which theatre was not just under attack, but prohibited, and thus under most intense pressure to reassert itself, evolve and prevail, I also aim to provide a model for engaging theatre during a period when it was allegedly absent. As such, this study asks us to understand prohibition and anti-theatricality not merely as oppressive, but also as productive forces in the history of theatre. The second objective is to revisit our notion of the early modern public. Looking at the theatrical aspects of an early modern public, I challenge the idea of the public sphere as a realm of rational debate, a notion still modelled on the readers and authors of printed works. Instead, I propose to understand the early modern public also in terms of theatre, and to take into account the complicity, but also the potential conflict between performers and audience. Such a model of the public has to attend to the impact of collective, affective and somatic experience, and to the risk of miscommunication, unexpected response or outright tumult. If theatre is, as David Wiles stresses, “a messy activity which cannot be reduced to any single category of the aesthetic, the political or the social, but involves the interpenetration of all three”, the same is true for a public called into being

by theatrical means.⁶⁹ To understand it, we need to embrace and understand its fundamental messiness. I think that this insight is in fact one of the greatest assets that the study of early modern publics can yield: in marked difference to Habermas's post-Enlightenment insistence on rationality, the early modern period did not subscribe to a dichotomy of reason and emotion. In light of the ways we see publics constituted in the twenty-first century, it seems that an engagement with performance-oriented, messy publics might resonate with some of the transformations of the public sphere we are witnessing today.

⁶⁹ Wiles (2011), 12.