CHAPTER 1

What audiences did

SLIE. Come *Sim*, where be the plaiers? *Sim* stand by Me and weele flout the plaiers out of their cotes.

– *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594), A4v

Authorship and the axis of reception

How does a play get an author? Despite our tendency today to use authors as rubrics for localizing, organizing, and interpreting cultural production, this was hardly a procedure intuitive to the early modern theatre, especially if we consider its textual output as an extension of the conditions of its performance. Theatre was – as it still remains – a collaborative activity. Playing companies, joint-stock corporations composed of sharers and occasionally led by manager-impresarios like the Admiral's Men's Philip Henslowe or the Queen Anne's Christopher Beeston, were the base economic units of the nascent industry. They installed themselves at particular playhouses, and developed repertories that matched the innovations of their competitors and established a market niche with their audiences. To meet the insatiable demand for novelty, and to maintain a near-daily performance schedule during peak months, those repertories could include as many as two dozen different plays, with some eighteen new ones rotated in for trial over the course of a season.[1] Playwrights, freshly minted from the universities or grammar schools and with financial hardships that impelled them into the players' employ, were in ready supply. Companies commissioned work from them, prescribed its content and supervised its progress, and paid them in advance, in installments, or upon completion. What the company commissioned it also owned: unless (as in rare cases like Shakespeare's) they were also sharers, poets retained no necessary rights in a manuscript, even if it were later retired. Few companies – the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men from the 1590s onward, Queen Anne's Men from the 1610s onward, and the boys' troupes of the 1580s and 1600s

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being the prominent exceptions – kept individual playwrights on permanent retainer, as "poets-in-ordinary." Writers were hired men, disposable and replaceable; assignments were parceled out piecemeal to syndicates that recognized talent only at an efficient distance.[2] From Henslowe's accounts, as well as from the relative lateness of playbook title pages to acknowledge co-authorship, we know that collaboration was the standard mode of composition, the unmarked case that more often than not remained unmarked.[3] Poets relentlessly recycled subject matter from classical literature, chronicle histories, topical news pamphlets, and popular Continental narratives; they imitated each other and, if a play did well enough to justify a sequel, they imitated themselves.

When a manuscript was finished, moreover, its utility instantly became a function of its disintegration. It was copied out into parts for the actors to study separately, each of whom was presumably free to add, delete, forget, or rearrange material so long as their cues stayed intact, and each of whom would have had little sense of the play's shape as a whole until rehearsal – of which there was perhaps only one, and in which playwrights probably enjoyed minimal involvement.[4] Despite evidence (mostly later in the period) of a custom whereby poets took a cut of the gate receipts from a play's second performance, they were not required to attend their own plays – some made a point of avoiding them – and the first extant instance of a playbill advertising an author's name dates from 1698.[5] Whatever singular creative labor still inhered (if it ever did) in their work, finally, now diffused itself among the players, prompters, scribes, stagehands, tailors, cosmeticians, carpenters, and musicians who coordinated its enactment on the stage. Buried beneath so many layers of physical realization and interpretation, nearly all of them more costly than the acquisition of a manuscript, it is hardly surprising that the writer of a play occasioned almost no comment from early modern playgoers compared to its performers, plot devices, *sententiae*, songs, dances, costumes, music, affect, effects, pyrotechnics, swordfights, and props. In most cases, they would have no way of knowing, and no reason to know, the writer's name. Theatre, as the term's wider sense in the period denoted, was the domain of the visible, the audible, the sensory: it rendered the abstract tangible, the distant present, the medial immediate, collapsing depth into alluring, overwhelming surface.[6] Except for scattered allusions to it in prologues too stylized to be meaningful, theatre was a technology fundamentally engineered to *conceal* authorship, if not utterly to foreclose it.

This litany of obstacles to authorial attribution on playbook title pages should by now be familiar. It serves as a preamble to the counterpart credo

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of the New Textualism, listing the levels of intercession in a manuscript's transition from performance to print – unknown source copy, adaptation for staging, sharers, scribes, state censors, publishers, printers, compositors, booksellers – that for us, as for early modern readers, render inaccessible any final, "authorial" intention. My purpose in rehearsing them here is not to dispute them, but actually to point out their incompleteness. This inventory of factors inhibiting the recognition of a play's "author," that is, spans only the *vertical* axis of production, the collaborations attendant upon a play's composition, formal realization, and commercial publication: in other words, the proprietary dilations and contractions of its life as a text.[7] It dichotomizes a play's staging and printing, in order to cast into relief the relative constructedness of print and its discursive codes – such as, most saliently, the fiction of authorial bylines. In so doing, however, it also constructs *staging* as a play's ontologically ideal state, the moment when its identity is most "natural" because it is maximally distributed among all agents of production. At this moment of performance, we imagine, the play properly "belongs" to its native and largest possible constituency of owners: the playing company, even the institution of theatre as a whole.[8]

Such theoretical back-formations of a dramatic ownership anterior to print – still modeled on linear, textual development – are too narrow, because they entirely neglect the multidimensional reality of that "purely" theatrical, performative moment: what might be termed the horizontal axis of reception. Performance does not take place in a vacuum, a clinical exercise impervious to its audience. And yet our narratives about the emergence of singular authorship are calibrated to a maximal, collective authorship that ignores this fact. Johannes de Witt's drawing of the Swan Theatre *circa* 1595, our only illustration of the interior of an Elizabethan amphitheatre, may in a small way be responsible for this oversight – since it curiously omits any spectators, depicting only the players onstage, seemingly performing for an empty ground and galleries. (See Figure 1.) What was in turn responsible for de Witt's drawing itself, for the discursive realignment that made this schematization thinkable, is in a sense the whole object of this study.[9]

Performance was, to begin with, inherently multiple, never identical from day to day. This had little to do with the obvious fact that players are human, fallible, sometimes ill-studied, and sometimes make spontaneous decisions, or the fact that technical effects do not always come off as planned. Everyone who has seen a play takes this for granted as a reality of theatre, though today we tend to suppress our appraisal of such

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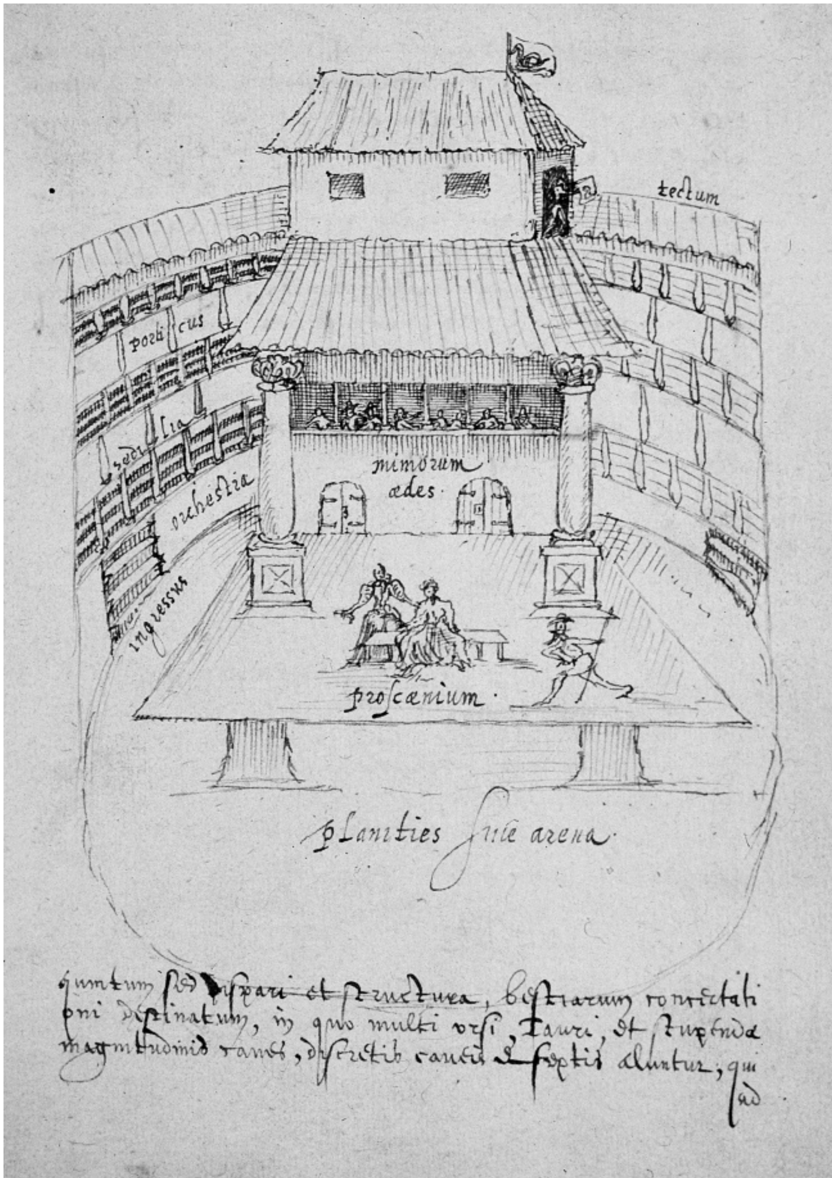

Figure 1 Aernout van Buchel, after Johannes de Witt. Drawing of the Swan Theatre, *c.* 1595.

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phenomena until the play is done, bracketing them off as deviations, good or bad, from an imaginary norm – norms of professionalism and decorum, or norms enshrined in a text that serves as a communal site of reference. ("It was a shame the Nurse flubbed her big speech"; "playing Romeo as nervous was an interesting choice.") For the early moderns, however, no such reference point (other than previous attendance) existed against which to assess the quality, much less the fidelity, of a production. Performance preceded text: as far as we know, not a single commercial play was ever published before it premiered onstage – often appearing years later if at all.[10] It also outpaced text: playhouse receipts dwarfed the standard size of playbook print runs, such that even after a play was published, one was still far more likely to encounter it live.[11] Rather than in print, a play inhered primarily in its performance, judged against itself or its predecessors, according to the instantaneous pleasure it gave. Its "text" was not fixed but memorial, and thus highly contingent. Even by the Restoration, when Shakespeare's plays had been in print for forty years, Samuel Pepys could see *The Tempest* eight times and maintain wildly divergent opinions of it – dependent not just on the acting but on his companionship that day, his health, his mood, the degree of his fellow spectators, and on one occasion his harassment by an orange vendor.[12] To him, it was simply never the same play twice – and as a result, it was barely the same play once. Each performance afforded regular opportunities for pleasure – plots, characters, speeches, costumes, songs, dances, jokes, mistakes. But those elements were subject to amplification by another element which was always unique: the composition and activity of the audience.

Take John Tatham's *Knavery In All Trades* (1664), in which several coffeehouse gentlemen reminisce about the plays of Prince Charles' Men at the Fortune before the war, and especially about a moment involving their bombastic tragedian, Richard Fowler:

> *Fowler* you know was appointed for the Conquering parts, and it being given out he was to play the Part of a great Captain and mighty Warriour, drew much Company; the Play began, and ended with his Valour; but at the end of the Fourth Act he laid so heavily about him, that some Mutes who stood for Souldiers, fell down as they were dead e're he had toucht their trembling Targets; so he brandisht his Sword & made his *Exit*; ne're minding to bring off his dead men; which they perceiving, crauld into the Tyreing house, at which, *Fowler* grew angry, and told 'em, Dogs you should have lain there till you had been fetcht off; and so they crauld out again, which gave the People such an occasion of Laughter, they cry'd that again, that again, that again. (D4v–E1r, emphasis in original)

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The anecdote's historical veracity does not finally matter as much as its narrative form. What starts as the fond recollection of an actor by the end becomes something else: as a sort of punchline – past the point where, if we have been imagining this sorry scene, any punchline is necessary – the gentleman makes sure to incorporate the audience's gleeful response. It becomes, in other words, not so much the memory of a play as a memory of the experience of watching it with others, an experience here recapitulated to include the audience's very desire for recapitulation – "that again, that again, that again." Clearly, they did not feel that this collapse of the play's fictional integrity in any way diminished its function. If anything, by collapsing it further – calling, impossibly, for the mistake to be repeated – they were actively *collaborating* in that function. Their participation is not the point of the story, but it is the precondition of the gentleman's remembering it: the players provided a stimulus, but the audience made it an event. That event here eclipses the identity of the play itself, for the gentleman never once bothers to mention its title. If it fell to him to prepare the playbook, what would it look like? Would it look like this?

Against meaning

To think of theatre in this way – as governed by the logic of social events, rather than by dramatic texts – may sound like a fairly banal claim, familiar to us since the advent of Performance Studies in the 1970s. But I want to pressure this banality as far as possible, in order to expose the critical paradox it serves to conceal. We tend only to pay lip service to the role of the audience, sprinkled anecdotally into introductory lectures to give our students a sense of the vitality of the books they are about to read. We invoke the boisterousness of early modern playgoers, their physical proximity to the stage, their intimate knowledge of the performers, their multiple registers of perception, their level of vocal involvement, and their appetite for self-conscious display. Yet seldom do we dwell on this range and intensity of affect long enough to ask how, in the same breath, we can also speak of plays as "commodities" in an early modern cultural marketplace, as self-contained aesthetic and ideological experiences available for purchase, as unilateral causes of predictable, replicable effects – as stable, discrete texts, in other words, capable of resolution into those very books our students are about to read. As charming as we find the idea of theatre-as-event, that is, we make little effort to reconcile it with our idea of theatre-as-text. Because if we did, we would discover them fundamentally incompatible.

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Recent treatments of early modern audiences have cut a wide path around this problem, preferring (when not confined to demography) to recover theatrical response *via* the very dramatic texts by which it is assumed to be already controlled.[13] "The plays contain within themselves," argues Jeremy Lopez in *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (2003), "most of the evidence needed to understand what audiences expected, enjoyed and experienced."[14] Yet that will hold true only of an audience exactly like the text through which it is being strained. While Lopez recognizes that "above all they enjoyed … *responding*, visibly, audibly, and physically," the kinds of "response" a play encodes are invariably limited to its own field of possibilities.[15] Every play assumes, for instance, that it is being watched intently from start to finish – that an audience's "response" is a response to *it*. Under these conditions, "response" starts to look more like "cognition," and, though multivalent, invitingly governed and predictable. It starts to look, in other words, like an expression of the "correct" way to watch the play. Thus, for Anthony Dawson, in his and Paul Yachnin's *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England* (2001), "participation" becomes the apotheosis of dramatic absorption, a eucharistic transport into the body of the actor; any resulting cries of ecstasy from the audience, rather than being disruptions, are effects the play has calculated.[16] Likewise, though Dawson acknowledges the cluttered visual field of the Elizabethan playhouse and its competition for playgoers' attentions – often generated by those playgoers themselves – the distractions he considers occur only on the stage itself, part of a complex "scopic management" by which spectatorial gaze is strategically redirected and heightened.[17]

The playgoer has a funny way of disappearing from these accounts: what is really being studied are *plays*, and their techniques for structuring the experience of an audience that, to them as for us, remain hypothetical and homogenized. From the perspective of the play, the most basic impediment to playing – the playgoer's cooperation – seems already overcome, and theatre can be depicted in a state of perfect equilibrium, finely calibrated to the instincts of its audiences. Extraordinarily supple though these reader-response analyses are, they reduce early modern playgoers to just that – *readers*, engaged merely in a more immersive version of the same process as the literary critic: the construction of meaning. Thus, for Dawson, plays stage "a contest … between alternative ways of turning theatrical experience into meaning," only when "theatrical experience" means dramatic experience, and when that contest unfolds solely onstage, in "the actor's body in concert with the poet's text."[18] Similarly, for Lopez,

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a play's intricate orchestration of audience affect reveals "how Elizabethan and Jacobean drama works" only if we presuppose *that* it worked, as well as an audience inclined to be so orchestrated – exactly the blank audience playbooks allow us to theorize.[19]

More recently, Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill have challenged this view of early modern audiences as mere extensions of dramatic effects, noting that it adopts the model of the antitheatrical writers of the 1570s and 1580s. Stephen Gosson, for example, describes plays as exerting a kind of hypnotic grip on the minds of audiences:

> When *Bacchus* beheld her [Ariadne] … and embraced her … At this the beholders beganne to shoute … when *Bacchus* rose vp … the beholders rose vp … when they sware, the company sware … when they departed to bedde; the company presently was set on fire, they that were married posted home to their wiues; they that were single vowed very solemnly to be wedded.[20]

No less simplistically, they argue, New Historicist critics tend to treat as absolute "the power of spectacle" to fashion early modern playgoers as political and aesthetic subjects, to shape "not merely the audience's interpretation but the audience itself."[21] In place of this "one-sided vision," they call for a less idealized approach to "audience," alive to the fact that "what a spectacle was intended to show and what its spectators made of it do not coincide with any great regularity."[22] They turn in particular to the work of Keir Elam, whose definition of theatre as "a set of competencies shared between the playwrights, actors, and audiences" – most basically, the agreement to "recognize the performance as such" – allows us "to consider the audience's role as active rather than passive."[23]

Yet as the phrase "made of it" suggests, there are still strict limits on this activity. As before, it is *interpretation*. Taking prologues and epilogues as the sites where these "competencies" were articulated, for Elam "[i]t is the spectator who must make sense of the performance for himself … However judicious or aberrant his decodification, the final responsibility for the meaning and coherence of what he constructs is his."[24] Spectators may no longer be passive or perfect, but they seem already party to the prior condition – to "recognize the performance" – that stipulates their job as "making sense," "decoding," as the "construction" of "meaning" and "coherence" from a representation that remains the center of their attention.[25] Low and Myhill, though aware that "the theater audience is ultimately free … to bring whatever expectations and spectatorial practices it pleases to bear," nevertheless conclude that "the theatrical spectacle … constitutes the audience and provides the object of interpretation";

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the terms on which they would recuperate that audience, then, like the very New Historicism they critique, are "as a vital partner in the production of meaning."[26] Yet to reduce theatre to a producer of meanings is again to take such "partnership" for granted, and not to alter its juniority. Their paradigmatic early modern playgoer might be someone like Simon Forman, whose idiosyncratic records of playgoing may bizarrely omit from *The Winter's Tale* Hermione's resurrection, but are nonetheless records of *plays*, single-mindedly focused on extracting prudential wisdom therefrom.[27] Meaning is variable, but its *construction* remains normative, and the target of this effort – the play – unquestioned. Audiences may be individuals, "interpreting" drama with different degrees of "competence," but in their *core* competence – accepting their role as such – they remain uniformly receivers, more or less malleable surfaces onto which authorial intention is inscribed.

Why do we assume early modern theatre understood itself to be about producing meanings? Were those two categories, "theatre" and "meaning," completely synonymous, or even always compatible? The answer depends on whom we listen to. Plays certainly suggest so, in the cerebral ministrations of their prologues and epilogues to "piece out our imperfections" or to "think but this, and all is mended." But we must remember that technically these passages speak to no one: talking to the audience is not the same as the audience talking, which playbooks seldom give us. Gosson's description of overheated playgoers, on the other hand, is worth a closer look, because it illustrates something more than mind control. Ostensibly, it shows the audience's enthrallment to representation, the direct transfer of *eros* from the stage into them. But that process is neither quiet nor passive. Even as they are compelled by the play, they compel it in turn, "shout[ing]" when the lovers embrace, which the lovers themselves do not. When they rise up at the lovers' rising, and "sware" in answer to the lovers' oaths, they physically impose themselves on the performance, creating visual distractions and auditory delays the actors must navigate. When the lovers depart, finally, they too depart – despite no indication that the play has ended. Unable to contain their arousal, they simply stampede for the exit. Gosson's account serves as an instance of hypernormative theatricality, yet the crowd's behavior is transgressive at the same time: their "recognition of the performance as such" seems to vary inversely with their enjoyment of it, such that, in a single, remarkable sequence, they disrupt it, overtake it, exceed it, and abandon it. Paradoxically, at the very moment that theatre transmits its meaning perfectly, "theatre" begins to break down – which may prompt us to reconsider just what the meaning of theatre

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was, and whether it inhered solely in the reception of representations. If Gosson's spectators are overpowered by the play, they overpower it in kind; the more yielding they are to its impressions, the more they impress themselves upon it in return. Perhaps they suggest – like the audience in the Fowler story – that what appears to us theatrical incompetence may simply be a different "competence," consisting not in constructivity but in destructivity. Perhaps, unfiltered through the evidence of plays, what better describes the relation between theatre and audience is not "partnership," but competition.

Theatrical success: or, audiences behaving badly

The bulk of this chapter advances a radically simple, radically counter-intuitive hypothesis: that early modern theatre was not about watching plays. Or at least, it was not about *watching* plays, insofar as by "watching" we tend to mean versions of "reading"; neither, as later chapters will argue, was it about watching *plays*, insofar as by "plays" we mean self-contained *mimeses* running uninterrupted from start to finish, and the totality of theatrical events. It looks that way to us, because playbooks are most of what survive, and the form in which they do so – as pre-packaged, integrated, delivered experiences – retroactively frames playgoing in its own image. Once we move beyond their internal evidence, however, we quickly begin to destabilize the hierarchy they seem designed to promote, discovering in the reception practices of the period, as Charles Whitney puts it, that "the emphasis … is as much on consumption as on production, on appropriation as on contemplation, and on creative re-performance as on creative performance."[28] Despite these claims, and its methodological value to this study, Whitney's *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama* (2006) is still largely concerned with "response" as a belated and secondary phenomenon, exploring how commonplace books, memoirs, and popular allusions attest to the "commodiousness" of dramatic material, in the variegated uses playgoers made of it after they left the playhouse.[29] Those claims can be pushed a great deal further if we attend to descriptions of what playgoers did *in* the playhouse itself, in the moment of performance: there, we will see, their far more literal "responses" suggest a basic inaccuracy to calling early modern theatre a "commodity" at all.

Plays almost never incorporate their real-time audiences, and more seldom still do they admit why they cannot. Early in *The Roaring Girl* (1611), Sir Alexander Wengrave takes his guests into his parlor, and unfurls an

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extended analogy between the tapestries in his "galleries" and the playhouse around them:

> Stories of men and women (mixt together
> Faire ones with foule, like sun-shine in wet wether)
> Within one square a thousand heads are laid
> So close, that all of heads, the roome seemes made,
> As many faces there (fil'd with blith lookes)
> Shew like the promising titles of new bookes,
> (Writ merily) the Readers being their owne eyes,
> Which seeme to moue and to giue plaudities …
> The very flowre (as twere) waues to and fro,
> And like a floating Iland, seemes to moue,
> Vpon a sea bound in with shores aboue. (B3r)

This is an idealized portrait: it captures not what Sir Alexander sees, but what he wishes to see. Had it really been this pacific, the Fortune audience would probably not need to be addressed in such mollifying terms, or at all. It is not even being addressed, indeed, since Sir Alexander describes it only obliquely, by means of metaphors that enclose what they describe. Middleton and Dekker here conjure the audience onstage in order to negate its real presence in the theatre, framing and binding it within static, two-dimensional media ("stories," paintings, "bookes") that isolate each spectator and displace them from the scene of production, rendering them solipsisms who "Read" only their own faces and applaud only with their eyes. By the end, where we expect "the very flowre … wau[ing] to and fro" to be the sea, it suddenly becomes "a floating Iland," land hemmed in by land, "bound in with shores aboue," with no real fluidity in sight.

The Roaring Girl is hardly unique for talking to (or at least about) its spectators. Yet the exceptional pressures of this play suggest why it works so hard to quarantine the audience: it is the only Tudor or Stuart play to star an audience member, depicting a real-life local celebrity and a patron of that very theatre. The audience, in other words, must be brought onstage because it is *already* onstage, and that incursion delicately handled. From its prologue, indeed, *The Roaring Girl* has been defusing that explosive potential:

> *A Play (expected long) makes the Audience looke*
> *For wonders: – that each Scœne should be a booke,*
> *Compos'd to all perfection; each one comes*
> *And brings a play in's head with him: up he summes,*
> *What he would of a Roaring Girle haue writ;*
> *If that he findes not here, he mewes at it …*

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> *I see attention sets wide ope her gates*
> *Of hearing, and with couetous listning waites,*
> *To know what Girle, this Roaring Girl should be …*
> *None of these Roaring Girles is ours …*
> *But would you know who 'tis? would you heare her name?*
> *Shee is cal'd madde* Moll*; her life, our acts proclaime.* (A4r)

The *first* time the play imagines its audience, they are not "Readers," but writers, each adamant that theatre realize their desires, and poised to do so themselves if it refuses. Here again the specter of mass authorship is raised only to dissolve into auditory. "Each" playgoer is tempted with a fantasy of totalized articulation with the stage, of "a play in's head" that might perfectly embody both the roaring girl and, by extension, him – and whose inevitable failure to appear, to let him "find" himself there, will elicit "mewes" instead. Dividing the audience against itself, however, the Prologue implies not just the mutual incompatibility of these fantasies but their individual error. He enumerates several permutations of "roaring girl" – "Suburbe roarers" who brawl in taverns, "civill Citty" ones who flout their husbands – as if they reflected the audience's fractious imaginings; he then affirms that "None of these Roaring Girles is ours." There is of course no doubt in anyone's mind about which Roaring Girl they expect to see; they know perfectly well this is a play about Moll Cutpurse. But that collectivity is here broken down and alienated from the object of its desire, and that object then reclaimed as the company's to perform. The authority of the stage, of "*our* acts" as a privileged site of representation, is ironically constructed in opposition to "bookes," which become instead figures for the audience. As silently as they "compos'd" before coming to the theatre, each playgoer must now "with couetous listning wait" for a play that will give everyone what they want only by giving no one in particular what they want.

Had Middleton and Dekker expected this shell game to trick a crowd into docility, however, they would likely not have replayed it just 130 lines later. Such metadramatic manipulations did not, as we will see, form a system of audience management. But *The Roaring Girl* at least pinpoints the nature of the problem: namely, why for early modern playgoers (as Sir Richard Baker explains in *Theatrum Redivivum* (*c*. 1634)), "a play *read*, hath not half the pleasure of a play *Acted*," and why we cannot easily reduce to "reading" the affective horizon they brought to the playhouse, no matter how capacious we make that term.[30] If this is what *The Roaring Girl* seems to ask for, it does so because what it truly fears is *writing*: the audience's belief that its *own* "stories … mixt together" should dictate the content

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of theatre, that its own reactions constitute an independent dramatic action, a play inclusive of yet greater than the play they are watching. The Prologue takes for granted their participation, just not their consensus about what they are participating in; that must be manufactured, here by invoking their differences to reunify them behind, if not in deference to, a single dramatic presentation.

The reverse – a crowd unified only by the individuality of its members – renders participation not passive but aggressive, and poses an intimidating prospect even in its most academic description. "Sit in a full Theater," writes an anonymous essayist in *New and Choyce Characters* (1615), "and you will thinke you see so many lines drawne from the circumference of so many eares, whiles the *Actor* is the *Center*."[31] Not normally organs of transmission, the gathering of "so many eares" here enacts a spatial violence on its object, radiating almost palpable lines of force that converge on a solitary body at the center of massive atmospheric pressure; theatre is depicted not just as a bodily system but as a writing system, a "drawing" that originates *from* its audience instead of terminating there. That audiences did not "read" performances as we read texts does not mean they did less, just that the forms of attention they brought could be *too* abundant, too intense, too diverse, to guarantee a clear division of producer and consumer – what *The Roaring Girl* called "*couetous* listning," an "ope[n] gate" that swings both ways. Every "eare" probes the stage for what it wants, and ("If that he findes not here") is ready to become – in this passage, is on the verge of becoming – a mouth, capable of generating its own satisfaction. Even the playgoer who writes this description, indeed, has already turned his ear away from the play in order to do so.

The evidence of early modern playgoing lies littered throughout the archive in miscellaneous sources like these: not just in dramatic paratexts (prologues, epilogues, inductions, dedications, commendatory verse, marginalia), but extradramatic documents as well (legal briefs, Revels accounts, civic and university regulations, essays, pamphlets, antitheatrical tracts, sermons, poetry, letters, diaries, ballads, jestbooks). Much of it has been compiled by the scholars already mentioned – most copiously in Andrew Gurr's *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (1987) – but its cumulative interpretation remains open.[32] Each datum carries a bias, to be sure, its own interests through which playgoing is viewed; naturally, they tend toward hyperbole, because their rhetorical investments are often extreme. "Everyone applauded politely and left" does not make for much of a story. But for every well-mannered audience that went unrecorded, the frequency and sweep of these references suggest, there must have been

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unruly ones whose misconducts also went unrecorded – which argues the surviving data a fairly representative sample. No one ever made a clinical study of theatrical behavior, chronicling a day at the playhouse from the audience's perspective. Yet that fact is in itself revealing. It tells us that an audience's experience was not especially felt to need preserving – not just because its principles were widely shared, but because on some level an audience's activity may have already constituted its own self-documentation, a spontaneous, evanescent, collective inscription on the face of the theatrical event.[33] It tells us, in other words, that what evidence we have may be closer to the rule than to the exception: that this volatile combustibility was the default condition of early modern theatre.

This is the common theme of theatre's promoters and detractors, its practitioners and regulators, its successes and failures alike. The conception of theatre as, in Whitney's phrase, "a participatory activity integrated into social occasions in which the distinction between stage and world was often moot," does not imply solely the distinction between mimetic and non-mimetic performance.[34] Regardless of the degree to which spectators might apprehend drama in either mode, what concerns us here is how they understood the parameters of their own *response* to exceed mere "apprehension" – even (and especially) in cases where illusionistic spectacle ought to have overpowered it. Such outbursts and ejaculations were, after all, predicted by Aristotelian *catharsis*, whose truth was never questioned by either the antitheatrical polemicists or their opponents. Gosson charged that players "studie to make our affections overflow, whereby they draw the bridle from that parte of the mind that should euer be curbed," and Heywood's *Apologie for Actors* (1616) only reinforces this by citing several instances of spontaneous criminal confession at the playhouse.[35] Less often noticed, perhaps, is the fact that when his woman from Lynn "suddenly skritched and cryed out Oh my husband, my husband! I see the ghost of my husband," it not only halts but in effect becomes the play itself: "at which shrill and unexpected out-cry, the people about her, moou'd to a strange amazement, inquired the reason of her clamour, when presently un-urged, she told them …"[36] The aftermath of the disruption proceeds to occupy the rest of Heywood's narrative, as it likewise does in his account of Spanish raiders in Cornwall who are surprised into discovering themselves by the alarms of a stage battle, and subsequently chased back to sea by the townspeople. In both cases, the play moves the audience to displace, and replace, the play.

While the spectators in these sensational examples may be forgiven for forgetting the performance at hand, such emotional excess features as a

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topos in far more mundane assessments of dramatic effect. Nashe reports that Talbot's death in *1 Henry VI* elicited "the teares of ten thousand spectators at least … who in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding"; in Chapman's *The Widowes Teares*, Lycus confesses of Cynthia's grief that "I was so transported with the spectacle … I was forc't to turne woman, and bear a part with her," to which Tharsalio replies: "So haue I seen many a moist Auditor doe at a play; when the story was but a meere fiction."[37] The satirical sense here, both qualitatively and quantitatively, is of mass psychic identification so disproportionate to its object that audience display threatens to join, or undermine, the play that provoked it; the convulsive weeping of even one spectator, let alone hundreds, can be a loud and distracting business. Curiously, only from the safe distance of print does the arousal of such empathy become a standard of literary praise in the 1630s, and only then does the counter-drama it formed in the playhouse start to become evident as well. For R. Gostelow, commending Thomas Randolph's *Poems* in 1638, it spanned both tragedy and comedy: "If sad, the mourners knew no thrifty size / In teares, but still cri'd out, oh lend more eyes. / If merry, then the juyce of *Comedy* / Soe sweetned every word, that we might see / Each stander by having enough to doe / To temper mirth."[38] Unlike Heywood's subjects, these are playgoers not suddenly called back to reality but, in Chapman's words, wholly "transported" out of it – a rapture they experience corporeally, as an inability to contain the speech and motion of their bodies. They become, in other words, players in their own right: "transported *with*" the fiction rather than by it, their participation in it becomes inevitable. So Thomas Palmer, in a verse for Beaumont and Fletcher's *Works* in 1647, describes how in their plays "*Like Scenes, we shifted Passions, and that so / Who only came to see, turn'd Actors too*."[39]

These examples, of course, are rather soft-focus accounts derived from the indoor halls of Jacobean and Caroline London – whose audience culture, as we will see, was not always so credulous – and from a belletristic culture perhaps attempting retroactively to spin vulgarity as refinement.[40] The critical vocabulary being invented here for proper dramatic reception, indeed, does not stray very far from its pejorative counterpart. Across the wider geographic and economic spectrum of early modern London, audiences showed their approval for a play most basically by making *noise*. And despite the conventional request for (or, perhaps, the disciplinary allowance of) "plaudities" at the end, this noise seems to have been almost continuous. Bylaws issued at Cambridge prior to a royal visit in 1632 give us a sense of what the professional players must have had to cope with:

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> nor before the comedy begin, nor all the time there, any rude or immodest exclamations be made; nor any humming, hawking, whistling, hissing or laughing be used, or any stamping or knocking … nor that any clapping of hands be had until the Plaudite at the end of the Comedy, except his Majesty, the Queen, or others of the best quality there, do apparently begin the same.[41]

Such behavior can hardly have been exceptional, or there would be no need for rules to prohibit it. And if a command performance by amateur players in a socially homogeneous setting required these strictures, then an urban, commercial playhouse, gathering a nearly comprehensive array of social strata under no official supervision, must have been a soundscape of brutal cacophony. The author of the utopian travelogue *Pimlyco, or Runne Red-Cap* (1609), describing the unruliness of the inhabitants as "a most strange confused noyse, / That sounded nothing but meere voice," is even in this exotic situation reminded of the London theatres: "Amazde I stood to see a Crowd / Of *Ciuill Throats* stretch'd out so lowd: / (As at a *New-play*) all the Roomes / Did swarme with *Gentiles* mix'd with *Groomes*. / So that I truly thought, all These / Came to see *Shore*, or *Pericles*."[42] Sir John Davies, in the crush of "A thousand townsmen, gentlemen, and whores, / Porters and servingmen" that made up a typical amphitheatre audience of the 1590s, singles out Inns of Court men as particularly "clamorous frye."[43] *The Faerie Queene* describes a chariot's thunderous wheels as "a troublous noyes, / That seemd some perilous tumult to desine, / Confusd with womens cries, and shouts of boyes, / Such as the troubled Theaters oftimes annoyes."[44] Drayton imagines an Olympian revelry "the thick-brayn'd Audience liuely to awake, / Till with shrill Claps the Theater doe shake"; elsewhere, more haughtily, he dismisses "those the thronged Theaters that presse … With showts and claps at euery little pawse."[45] Dekker's acid Prologue to *If It Be Not Good the Diuel Is In It* (1612) detests precisely this constant, unthinking approbation, reviling any play that, "Ift fill a house with Fish wiues, *Rare, They All Roare*"; it can only pray for at least a moment of "rare Silence" before they "clap their *Brawny hands*, / *T'applaud*, what their *charmd* soule scarce understands."[46] Nearly twenty years on, the din of Dekker's Red Bull remained unchanged. According to Thomas Carew in 1630, there "*noyse preuayles, and he is taxd for drowth / Of wit, that with the crie, spends not his mouth*"; "*These are the men in crowded heapes that throng / To that adulterate stage, where not a tong / Of the untun'd Kennell, can a line repeat / Of serious sense: but like lips, meet like meat*."[47] It is unclear whether the "untun'd Kennel" who senselessly "repeat" are the actors delivering their lines, or the spectators repeating aloud lines they

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found impressive – which makes one wonder, as it does Carew, how anyone heard much of anything at all.

Similar challenges of audibility were encountered by London's outdoor preachers – congregants relaying lines to latecomers and to those on the fringes of the assembly, or echoing in appreciation, or enthusiastically answering the preacher himself – and recent reconstructions of sermonic performance shed indirect light on playhouse realities. John Donne, a convert from one venue to the other, routinely anticipated such feedback, and built his sermons around soliciting them.[48] He speaks of his congregations, indeed, as having imported to their churchgoing precisely the disruptive habits of their playgoing:

> all that had been formerly used in Theaters, *Acclamations* and *Plaudites*, was brought into the *Church*, and not onely the vulgar people, but learned hearers were as loud, and as profuse in those declarations, those vocall acclamations, and those plaudites in the passages, and transitions, in Sermons, as ever they had been at the Stage … if you do not joyne with the Congregation in those *Plaudites*, the whole Congregation will thinke you the onely ignorant person, in the Congregation … the people doe yet answer the Preacher, if his questions be Applyable to them, and may induce an answer, with these vocall acclamations, *Sir, we will, Sir, we will not.*[49]

Discussing this passage, John N. Wall concludes that, rather than mere recitations of text, sermons were "conversations … interactive performance[s] in which the congregation and preacher collaborated in the creation of the occasion," usefully suggesting that "theatrical performance" be viewed in cognate terms.[50] Yet this analogy must also factor in Donne's reluctance to see it as "collaboration," and his irritation at its tendency – as in the theatres – to manifest as destruction and appropriation. "[T]hose impertenent Interjections," he continues, "swallow up one quarter of his [the preacher's] houre, and many that were not within distance of hearing the Sermon, will give a censure upon it, according to the frequencie, or paucitie of these acclamations."[51] The more an audience enjoys a sermon, the less they will hear of it, because their enjoyment competes with and "swallows" its remainder; the farther into the audience the performance travels, the more it becomes *their* performance alone, the actor's agency "swallowed" again, registered only in the thing that obscures it. Sermons were free, moreover, but plays were not; sermons were bound to their allotted hour, but plays were not. If we believe Donne's claim that he lost one quarter of his prepared material to audience response, we have at least one cause (to which we will add more) of why play performances, as Michael J. Hirrel argues, typically ran four or five hours: a substantial part

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of those performances may have consisted quite literally not of the play at all, but of the dilatory performance of its own reception.[52]

Theatrical failure: or, audiences still behaving badly

None of the audiences we have observed thus far are hostile. Their excesses – uncontrollable sexual excitement, confession, tears, laughter, empathy, clamor, murmur, repetition, vocalic interlocution, continuous applause – may be cast as transgressive to greater or lesser degrees, but the affective involvement they symptomatize is absolutely normative. These are spectators engaging with dramatic spectacle exactly as they should, yet this engagement is always, almost programmatically, carried too far: even when theatre works, it teeters on the brink of practical failure – the audience's "swallowing" the stage with interference, and the players' inability to execute the play. When we turn to actual instances of theatrical failure, as a result, they strangely start to look like success – depending, crucially, on what definition of "theatre" we are pursuing, and whose.

If until now we have sampled how audiences reacted to what they *liked*, what they *dis*liked they greeted much the same way. John Lyly, ever steeled for disaster, provides a clutch of examples. Writing for the polite clientele of the Blackfriars in the 1580s, Lyly seemingly could not begin a play without reminding them what politeness meant: in a word, quiet, which under no circumstances he expected to get. *Campaspe* (1584) begs its audience that "although there bee in your precise judgementes an universall mislike, yet we maye enioy by your woonted curtesies a generall silence"; *Midas* (pr. 1592), "that presenting our studies before Gentlemen, thogh they receiue an inward mislike, wee shall not be hist with an open disgrace"; *Sapho and Phao* (1584), that the audience not "with open reproach blame our good meaninges" – and, even more hopelessly, should the play somehow manage to please, that it produce only "soft smiling, not loude laughing."[53] For Lyly, even at the hands of an upper-class audience, there was simply no way to win. And the archive is replete with accounts of what it was like to lose: the literary legitimations of dramatists are built on the carcasses of rejected plays, bitter recognitions of their own continuing theatrical irrelevance. Jonson's *Sejanus* (1605) can only look back in anger at the playhouse mob that chased it into print: one colleague scorns "the Peoples beastly rage, / Bent to confound thy graue, and learned toile," while another vilifies them as "the throate of the rude Sea … the boggy and engulfed brests / Of Hyrelings, sworne to finde most Right, most rude."[54] The ascription of mindless confusion to the audience is, seemingly without contradiction,

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always coupled with the ascription of single-minded malice.[55] Of Jonson's "tedious" *Catiline* (1611) Leonard Digges recalls that "they would not brooke a line";[56] Fletcher, lauding the play's publication, imagines it still plagued by its original spectators more than plaguing them: "such men, / Deare friend, must see your Booke, and reade; and then, / Out of their learned ignorance, crie ill, / And lay you by, calling for mad *Pasquill*, / Or *Greene's* deare *Groatesworth*, or *Tom Coryate*."[57] His own *Faithfull Shepheardesse* had suffered the fate of being shouted down the year before, indeed, when "the people … hauing euer had a singuler guift in defining," mistook his pastoral tragicomedy for a country romp, "And missing whitsun ales, creame, wassel & morris-dances, began to be angry."[58]

Webster, meanwhile, dispenses with such contingent rationalizations. He blames the failure of *The White Divel* (1612) on its lacking "a full and understanding Auditory," but goes on to confess this phrase an oxymoron: "for should a man present to such an Auditory, the most sententious Tragedy that euer was written … the breath that comes frõ the uncapable multitude, is able to poison it."[59] "Uncapable" of enjoying the play, perhaps, but all too capable of ruining it – activities that by now are coming to seem interchangeable. "This is the straine that chokes the theaters," notes Marston's Laverdure in *What You Will* (1601), "that makes them crack with full stufft audience … to crack the Authors neck, / This admiration and applause persues."[60] Both Marston and Webster still assume, of course, that "the Author" is the ultimate target of the audience's violence; they nevertheless imply, like the whole jeremiadic tradition they join, that the pleasure of the playgoer actually *consists* in destroying the play, one way or another. Nathan Field says as much, when in verses for *The Faithfull Shepheardesse* he prefers being heckled to the constant interruption of cheering – as if those really are the only two options: "Such art" as Fletcher's flop, he declares, "should me better satisfie, / Then if the monster clapt his thousand hands, / And drownd the sceane with his confused cry."[61] If the audience is not so "transported with" the play as to hijack it, it simply transports the play right out of the playhouse. For John Davies of Hereford, "It's easie to cry *Hisse*, but tis not so / To silence it," for those hisses will instantly transform into "Claps, that Clap vp all."[62]

There is little practical difference, then, between theatrical success and theatrical failure: the choice is either to be booed off stage, or to watch one's work be "drownd" with equally indiscriminate applause. When approbation and condemnation manifest in exactly the same way, and where the value of a good is invariably judged at the material expense of the good itself, the term "commodity" becomes no longer adequate to describe the

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baseline economic identity of early modern theatre. If anywhere, rather, we must locate it *in* this very act of judgment, in an audience's unilateral seizure of control over the stage, and in its exercise of sovereignty thereby. William Fennor's "Description of a Poet" (1616) conventionally grieves that "Sweet poesye" should be "condemn'd, and iudg'd to die / Without iust triall, by a multitude / Whose iudgements are illiterate, and rude," but it proceeds to analyze the group psychology of public theatre:

> Clapping, or hissing, is the onely meane
> That tries and searches out a well writ Sceane …
> The stinckards oft will hisse without a cause,
> And for a baudy ieast will giue applause.
> Let one but aske the reason why they roare
> They'l answere, cause the rest did so before.[63]

The audience is engaged here in a "trial," a "searche," both of the authority of the stage and of its own as measured against it; "clapping" and "hissing" are equivalent probative methods, and their circular, collective answer to "why they roare," insufficient to a model of theatre as discrete production and consumption, is more consistent with viewing it as the interrogation of these relationships. The play Fennor eulogizes (*Sejanus*, again) may have been staged in 1603, but his recollection is firmly grounded in the public playhouse mentality of 1616 – a mentality on which the rising frequency of single-author plays, of bylines on playbook title pages, and of dedications and commendatory verses within those playbooks (not to mention the publication of Jonson's *Workes* that same year) have apparently made zero impact in the perception of drama as literary artifact.

To the "common" playgoer, if these examples can construct such a person, theatre remained not a body of texts but a ritualized (and disturbingly arbitrary) violence against textual bodies, a forum for constructing *themselves* as persons. For Anthony Munday, as for other antitheatricalists, the readiest danger of playhouses lay in "the disorder of their Auditorie," which they fully supply themselves: "[you] shall find there no want of yong ruffins, nor lacke of harlots, vtterlie past al shame: who presse to the fore-frunt of the scaffoldes, to the end to showe their impudencie, and to be as an obiect to al mens eies."[64] "Your Car-man and Tinker," Dekker explains in *The Guls Horne-booke* (1609), "claime as strong a voice in their suffrage, and sit to giue judgement on the plaies life and death, as well as the prowdest *Momus* among the tribe of *Critick*."[65] "To cry Playes downe," sighs Davenant, "Is halfe the businesse Termers have in towne."[66] To Henry Fitzgeffrey's *Notes from Blackfriars* (1617), an epigrammatic vanity fair of playhouse *ennui*, the play is an extension of the audience's

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pre-show posturing for each other, and he expects "to bee made *Adder*-deafe with *Pippin*-crye."[67] According to Shirley, "hee that can / Talke loud, and high, is held the witty man, / And censures finely, rules the Box, and strikes / With his court nod consent to what he likes."[68] At the premiere of Killigrew's *Pallantus and Eudora* (*c.* 1635), says its publisher, an auditor rose to denounce "the Indecorum that appear'd to Some, in the Part of *Cleander*, who being represented a Person of seventeen yeares of age, is made to speak words, that would better sute with the age of thirty," only to be rebutted by another auditor:

> But the Answer that was given … by the Lord Viscount *Faulkland*, may satisfie all others … This Noble Person, having for some time suffered the unquiet, and impertinent Dislikes of this Auditor, when he made his last Exception, forbore him no longer, but (though he were one he knew not) told him, *Sir 'tis not altogether so Monsterous and Impossible, for One of Seventeen yeares to speak at such a Rate, when He that made him speak in that manner, and writ the whole Play, was Himself no Older*.[69]

By 1635, at least one playgoer knows who "the author" is; the other clearly does not, and is surprised by the appeal to him. Yet what surprises us is that so lengthy and public an argument is being conducted at all, such that everyone must "for some time" "suffer" it. Seemingly in the midst of the play, the theatre has lapsed into open-floor critical debate. Neither does Falkland entirely end it: rather than shush him, he "answers" him, engaging in that debate. Indeed, on the pretext of defending the poet, Falkland merely uses him to do what his opponent is already doing – to grandstand, to perform his own wit, judgment, and nobility, to make himself known. If the play continues after this outburst, it does so on *his* authority, not the poet's; "He that … writ the whole Play" is not the one who makes it. (It worked: his name is in the playbook.) Theatrical self-fashioning was not a mental operation, a matter of internalizing the representations one saw projected onstage. It involved physically projecting oneself *onto* that stage, and claiming that stage for oneself.

This is not an exaggeration: it involved actual projectiles. A variety of food and drink was available for purchase at the playhouses, and in a letter to Spenser, Gabriel Harvey explicitly links the two forms of consumption: the theatre for him is "whereat thou and thy lively copesmates in London maye lawghe ther mouthes and bellyes full for pence or twoepence apeece."[70] Not only does each ware – admission to a play and of a snack – cost the same, but Harvey's Rabelaisian image renders them substitutable. Just as "lawghe ther mouthes … full" implies an activity

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equally ingressive and egressive, so matter intended for the belly could end up furnishing the means of that expression, taking the place of the mouth. The practice of hurling food at the stage certainly did not originate with the Elizabethans – it is as old as theatre itself – nor did it end with them. As late as 1849 William Macready could be assaulted with eggs, apples, potatoes, bottles, and sticks. The Astor Place riot, however, was an isolated flashpoint of international tensions, and the audience had come armed with its own ballistics; the house did not vend such items itself, and they were not an extension – nor, consequently, was their use a rejection – of its authority. Elizabethan playhouses, by contrast, made a business of equipping patrons with weapons to disrupt their business. "Unlesse … the popular humour [were] satisfied, as sometimes it so fortun'd, that the Players were refractory," recalled Edmund Gayton in 1654, "the Benches, the tiles, the laths, the stones, Oranges, Apples, Nuts, flew about most liberally, and as there were Mechanicks of all professions, who fell every one to his owne trade, and dissolved a house in an instant, and made a ruine of a stately Fabric."[71] Gayton here recounts what audiences did merely when refused their *choice* of play, not their response to one: their barrage does not appraise a commodity, it *replaces* the commodity. Denied the particular play it wants to destroy, the crowd simply dismantles the playhouse. One is as good as the other, because each is the same as the other.

Spectatorial violence against the stage was never a purely anarchic gesture; it was part of a continuum of legibly theatrical behavior. Whether the bombardment in question were vocal or physical, both derived from the same structured, antagonistic impulse, and could just as often form a theatrically *productive* rather than destructive act. Tatham's "Prologue spoken upon removing of the late Fortune Players to the Bull" (1640) asks the audience to refrain from throwing fruit not because they are impatient for the play to end, but because they are impatient for it to begin:

> Onely we would request you to forebeare
> Your wonted custom, banding *Tyle*, or Peare,
> Against our *curtaines*, to allure *us* forth.
> O pray take notice *these* are of more Worth,
> Pure Naples silk, not *Worstead* …[72]

Pleading for respect of company property may have been poor tactics here, since the Red Bull audience the Prologue addresses appears every bit as conscious of it, and jealous of it, as the audiences the players had just left at the Fortune: "Those that now sojourne with *her* [the Fortune], bring a noyse / Of *Rables*, *Apple-wives* and Chimney-boyes, / Whose

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shrill confused Ecchoes loud doe cry, / Enlarge your *Commons*, wee hate *Privacie*."[73] The Red Bull crowd's barrage of the playhouse's own material excrescence, similarly, is not only "custom" – a prologue could hardly have been prepared for a freak incident – but forms an identical bid to "enlarge the Commons" of the stage, to strip the veil of propriety that segregates producers from consumers. From the audience's perspective, the play has already begun with the demand that it begin; "playing" is greater than "the play." Even at the upscale Whitefriars in the 1630s, a Prologue worries that they will "Damne unaraign'd" the play, "[j]udging it sin enough that it is *Ours*."[74]

This expectation of involvement, of generative dialogue with the stage, is best illustrated by a jest – to whose subject we will return – that exposes the circular economy of the theatrical event by reducing its entire content to a playgoer's missile:

> At the *Bull* in *Bishops-gate-street*, where the Queenes Players oftentimes played, *Tarlton* comming on the Stage, one from the Gallery threw a Pippin at him. *Tarlton* tooke up the pip, and looking on it, made this sudden iest.
>
> *Pip in, or nose in, chuse you whether,*
> *Put yours in, ere I put in the other.*
> *Pippin you haue put in: then, for my grace,*
> *Would I might put your nose in another place.*
>
> … *Tarlton* hauing flouted the fellow for his pippin which hee threw, hee thought to be meet with *Tarlton* at length. So in the Play *Tarltons* part was to trauell, who kneeling down to take his father blessing, the fellow threw an Apple at him, which hit him on the cheek.[75]

Predictably, another ribald rhyme ensued, this time about the playgoer's being escorted by a whore instead of his wife, at which "the people laughed heartily."[76] The jest prepares us for how stage clowns like Tarlton epitomized this sense of theatre as unstructured, bilateral game – in their focalization of its antagonistic impulses, and their proliferation into all areas of the theatrical program – which will be the subject of Chapter 2. But it will suffice here to note, amid its blow-by-blow account, the kinds of interchange the jest takes for granted. This altercation occurs not at the opening or close of a play, but in the middle; Tarlton is merely entering to take up his part, and does nothing to provoke the playgoer's attack. Rather, he is the object of provocation: the "fellow" throws his pippin to elicit retaliation – and does not hesitate to follow it up with another, knowing full well that the second rebuttal will be even more withering. He does so, however, "to be meet" with Tarlton, a battle for authority that

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he wins even as he loses it. Despite his public humiliation, he succeeds in temporarily wresting control of the player, "enlarging" the "Commons" of the stage, and forcing it to acknowledge him; the assault is never rebuked as a violation of decorum, only countered as personal challenge. The play we were not even told was in progress when the jest began presumably carries on once it is done, as if such "sudden" releases of bile and merriment were an obligatory part of theatrical experience, and not only exist independent of its aesthetic design, but take priority over it. The jest is interested not in the fictional conflicts theatre stages, but the real ones: once again, it remembers the interaction of player and auditor, not the title of the play.

At its ugliest, this contest could turn deadly, and (as Gayton's example shows) could erupt even more forcefully if denied its fulfillment. Davenant's epilogue to *News From Plymouth* (1635) toys with such danger when it returns an armed Sir Furious to the stage, threatening to cut to ribbons a Globe audience that might "cry down our Play," because it was "promise[d] shewes, / Dancing, and Buckler Fights":

> For if you dare but whisper one false Note
> Here in this House, or passing to take Boat,
> Good faith I'll mow you off with my short Sword …
> for since my mettal lies
> To destroy yours, and our Enemies,
> Can I do less (be your own Judges) when
> You lay sad plots to begger the King's Men?"[77]

Still in character, the actor is obviously joking, but he flirts with a relationship between player and audience that often did revert to that of "Enemies." In April 1580, two Earl of Oxford's players, Robert Leveson and Lawrence Dutton, were arrested for "committing of disorders and frayes appon the gentlemen of the Inns of Court" – that is, for physically assaulting their own audience, which must have done something to invite it. A City order of 11 July 1581 accused "Parr Stafferton gentleman of Grayes Inne for that he that daye brought a dysordered companye of the Innes of Courte & others to assalte Arthur Kynge, Thomas Goodale, and others, servauntes to the Lord Barkley, & players of Enterludes within the Cytte" – a skirmish for which the players in question, clearly not blameless either, were detained as well.[78] Even (or especially) clowns were not immune to these outbursts of naked aggression, and in one case were its culprits. On 15 June 1583, at the Red Lion in Norwich, a disgruntled playgoer refused payment at the door, drawing the attention of Tarlton and his fellow comedians John Bentley and John Singer, who

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were already in the midst of performing. We do not know why the scuffle started, but it ended with the three charging off the stage in pursuit, rapiers drawn, and the playgoer dead in the street, with Bentley, Singer, and another bystander, Henry Browne, held on individual bonds of £80 until early July.[79]

Of tumults strictly between playgoers, we have relatively few cases. But that does not mean they did not happen; indeed, given the frequency with which playgoers attacked *players*, they must have happened often. "[C]onsidering the alarm so regularly voiced by the civil authorities," writes Gurr, "the number of affrays … was almost nil."[80] But what counts as an "affray," to those authorities or to us, is precisely the question here. Those that merited documentation usually involve large numbers of people, or grievous injury, or noble personage – and that they still did so further attests to the incipient violence of the playhouse atmosphere. In 1584 William Fleetwood informed Lord Burghley of "one Browne, a serving man in a blew coat, a shifting fellowe having a perrelous witt of his owne, entending a spoile if he cold have browghte it to passe, [who] did at Theatre door qurell with certen poore boyes, handicraft prentises, and strook some of them, and lastlie he with his sword wonded and maimed one of the boyes upon the left hand."[81] Fleetwood notes that "there assembled nere a ml [thousand] people." In 1622, one Captain Essex tussled with a nobleman for refusing to clear his and his wife's sightline; "the lord then drew his sword and ran full butt at him, and might have slain the Countesse as well as him."[82] A similar fracas occurred in 1636 between the Duke of Lennox and the Lord Chamberlain, over a box seat at a new Blackfriars play.[83] From less official quarters, we know that playgoers like Fleetwood's Browne, armed with "a perrelous witt" and bound for the playhouse in search of a fight, were ubiquitous. Henry Chettle in 1592 bemoans the "barbarously rude … disorders" caused by "lewd mates that long for innouation," who, "when they see aduantage … will be of either side, though they be of no side"; "Ruffians," according to Richard Brathwaite in 1631, "to a play [will] hazard to go, though with never a rag of money," "make *forcible entrie*," and "Forthwith, by violent assault and assent, they aspire to the two-pennie room," to smoke discarded cigar butts, "applaud a prophane jeast immeasurably, and … grow distastefully rude to all the Companie."[84] Seething with such fractious energies, the playhouse must have been in a constant state of "affray": if they rarely exploded, what looks to us like (in Paul Menzer's phrase) "theatrical strategies of crowd control" may merely be the fact that those energies were continuously vented at the stage.[85] Outside playhouses – from the Theatre to the Curtain

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to the Globe to the Fortune to the Red Bull to the Cock-pit – rioters periodically gathered to destroy them, in 1584, 1592, 1597, 1617, and 1626; inside them, that attitude was codified in the norms of playgoing itself. At the Red Bull in 1622, an errant sword grazed a feltmaker's apprentice standing too near the stage during a duel – whereupon, taking it as a personal affront, he stormed out in anger, vowing the collective revenge of all apprentices.[86]

Too near, too far, too much, too little, too intent, too detached: there seem to have been only wrong ways to experience early modern theatre, such that, cumulatively, they represent kaleidoscopic variations on the right one, and a single one. Playgoing unfolded along a boundary between fiction and reality that was routinely crossed – by the playgoer him or herself – and whose crossing was its basic function: the only norm of playhouse behavior was, ultimately, transgression, be it through deliberately disrupting the play or compulsively inserting oneself into it. Whether fueled by sublime, affective transport or merely by cruel, disaffected sport, each playgoer had a "perrelous witt of his owne," and for them the purpose of a play – whether it wanted it or not – was to actuate that sense of self-possession through their possession of the stage itself, as an extension of its dramatic representations or in despite of them. There is no difference between the "absurdity [of] a Country-Gentleman" who, according to a Caroline memoir, during a play at Blackfriars "was so caught with the naturall action of a Youth (that represented a ravish'd Lady) as he swore alowd, he would not sleep untill he had killed her ravisher,"[87] and the audience of a Gray's Inn Christmas revel of 1594 that precipitated the famous "Night of Errors":

> When the Ambassador was placed … there arose such a disordered Tumult and Crowd upon the Stage, that there was no Opportunity to effect that which was intended: There came so great a number of worshipful Personages upon the Stage, that might not be displaced; and Gentlewomen, whose Sex did privilege them from Violence, that … at length there was no hope of Redress for that present.[88]

Every conceivable disparity in circumstance is spanned in these two examples: historical, geographic, socioeconomic, institutional, occasional, numerical, sexual. In one case, the play's mimetic force moves a solitary, unsophisticated spectator to interrupt; in the other, there *is* no play, because the courtly audience has already overrun it. One is a result of extreme dramatic reception, the other of its extreme refusal. Yet both remain, from an early modern perspective, essentially "theatrical," insofar as they convert *reception* into *production* – the country gentleman because

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his swearing "alowd" projects him vocally onto the stage, the courtiers because they project themselves quite physically onto the stage, and will not give it up. Both plays succeed, ironically, because both plays finally *become* their audiences, and the audience the play; one just does it faster than the other.

Even the court masque, a genre constructed around this very principle, was not immune to the unpredictability of audience interaction. Where participation was the rule, the best way to perform oneself might be not to participate at all. At *Love Restored*, performed in 1612 before King James and Prince Henry, the masquers were ten lords, "the spirit of Court, and flower of men"; when, however, the lords offered to take ladies to dance the revels, reports John Chamberlain, "beginning with the ladies of Essex and Cranbourne, they were refused, which set an example to the rest, so that the lords were fain to dance alone and make court to one another."[89] At a lost masque known only through John Harington's letter about it as *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, performed in 1606 for James and the visiting Christian IV of Denmark, James likewise declined to play his part, much to the consternation of the actors:

> Victory, in bright armor … presented a rich sword to the king, who did not accept it, but put it by with his hand … [she] did endeavour to make suit to the king … but after much lamentable utterance, she was led away … I never did see such lack of good order, discretion and sobriety.[90]

Harington also reports that the Queen of Sheba spilled a dish of fruit in Christian's lap, that he was too drunk to dance with her or even to stand, and that he had to be carried to bed; perhaps the masque (if it is not altogether Harington's fiction) is lost for a reason.

The contrast between Jonson and Dekker's *King's Entertainment* / *Magnificent Entertainment* (1604), performed at James's royal entry to London, and Gilbert Dugdale's *The Time Triumphant* (1604), a journalistic narrative of the entry itself, illustrates how differently the same incident could be represented as text and as social event. Dugdale stresses not the collaboration of poets, or of poets and actors, but of various kinds of audience. His attention flits between the actions of the monarch and those of the commoners in attendance, giving us details of the pageant its texts never record: how "the women weeping ripe cryed all in one voice God blesse the Royall *Queene*"; how a tour of the Royal Exchange caused such a "hurly burly" that James was forced to view it from a window, where he "commended the rudeness of the Multitude, who regardless of time, place or person, will be so troublesome" – and whom Dugdale admonishes

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not to "prease your Soueraigne thereby to offend him."[91] On his progress home, there were impromptu street shows and "orations": "at the corner of the streete stood me one old man with a white beard" who proudly recites a verse of his own making, though "the noyse … was not fauorable to him"; at "the great cundyt [conduit] on the top thereof, stood a prentise in a black coate," whose shop call – "What lack you gentlemen?" – turns into a welcome song.[92] Far from beholders of an event, they have come to be actors, and Dugdale makes them authors, transcribing their performances "so that all [their] fellow Subiectes may see."[93] The pomp of diplomats and aldermen, the fireworks, the waterworks, and Jonson and Dekker's central masque receive only passing mention, because they are not central. Given a chance to document the occasion, the audience documented itself.

Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) is the great monument to this continuous back-channel of performance in the playhouse, of course, and in its delightfully insane way an attempt to overload its circuits. The play is terrific fun, yet rather than view it as a proto-Brechtian experiment in audience estrangement, we should perhaps regard it as on some level the most *realistic* playbook in the early modern canon. If playbooks recorded a play's performance rather than its text, preserving what the audience did as well as the actors, every play would have its own George and Nell – probably many – either chattering onstage or calling out from the yard. One manuscript jestbook relates how, during a play at Woodstock, a line spoken onstage was bettered by one "Hoskins of Oxford," who "standinge by as a spectator rimes openly to it": the player's line was "As at a banquett some meates have sweet some saure tast," to which Hoskins retorted, "Even so your dublett is to short in the waste."[94] But this is a jestbook, not a playbook. Uniquely, then, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* simulates what a play was *expected* to do for its audience: erase the distinction between the two domains.[95] The rest of Thomas Palmer's panegyric to Fletcher, indeed, enshrines him for that very virtue:

> How didst thou sway the Theatre! Make us feele
> The players wounds were true, and their swords, steele!
> Nay, stranger yet, how often did I know
> When the Spectators ran to save the blow?
> Frozen with griefe we could not stir away
> Vntill the Epilogue told us 'twas a Play.[96]

The singularity of Fletcher's authorship here comes to rest, ironically, on its multiplicity. So visceral is the spectators' sense of transport by the play that they helplessly transport themselves into it, running up onto the stage; desperate to alter its course, they must be told it is "a Play," which

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here means something quite different from what they took it to mean. For Palmer, "a Play" is a closed text, already written, performing only itself; for the audience, it is an occasion to perform themselves as well.

Once again, in another moment of "running to save the blow," we have Edmund Gayton to tell us which took precedence in the imagination of the playgoing public:

> A passionate Butcher of our Nation … being at the Play, called *the Greeks and Trojans*, and seeing *Hector* over-powred by *Mirmydons*, got upon the Stage, and with his good Battoone tooke the true *Trojans* part so stoutly, that he routed the *Greeks*, and rayled upon them loudly for a company of cowardly slaves to assault one man with so much odds. He strooke moreover such an especiall acquaintance with *Hector*, that for a long time *Hector* could not obtaine leave of him to be kill'd, that the Play might go on; and the cudgelled *Mirmydons* durst not enter againe, till *Hector*, having prevailed upon his unexpected second, return'd him over the stage againe into the yard from whence he came.[97]

Perhaps no piece of evidence argues better for the purpose of early modern playing, in both its form and its content, as the self-creation of its audience. Gayton's butcher here attempts to rewrite not just a play in progress, but history itself: the Hector he defends is, after all, his ancestor, according to the myth of Brutus and of London as Troynovant; the "true *Trojans* part" he takes up is also his own, and that of every red-blooded Englishman in attendance. The play compels him to intervene: it would be a failure if he did not. And yet the consequence of his taking affective "part" in it is his taking literal part in it, taking the play apart in the process. The damage he inflicts runs deeper than delay: though "the Play might go on," he has exposed the contingency of its dramatic order. The invincible Myrmidons are proven "a company of cowardly slaves," quaking backstage in terror; Hector must die only because someone somewhere *says* he must, and before this absent authority can be obeyed, it is forced to bow to that of the playgoer, from whom Hector must "obtaine leave." Here again, a playgoer needs the idea of "the script" *explained* to him. It seems a novel concept, and he does not like it.

For Gayton's butcher, not even history is scripted. How can theatre be? The final form of a play, as he understands it, is always determined by its audience, and as a result, form is never final. So inextricable was participation from performance, indeed, that we find it even figured *as* performance – as the reciprocal of what the onstage actors do, the complementary other half of a collaborative, organic social text. "*Player* is much out of countenance," writes Thomas Gainsford, "if fooles doe not

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laugh at them, boyes clappe their hands, pesants ope their throates, and the rude raskal rabble cry excellent, excellent: the knaues haue acted their parts in print."[98] In the remainder of this chapter, we will ask why, if those "parts" were so fundamental, they too were not put into print – and why, when they failed to "find themselves" there, playgoers did not seem to mind.

The improbability of playbooks

> Spectator, this Lifes Shaddow is; To see
> The truer image and a livelier he
> Turne reader.
>
> – Leonard Digges, "Upon the Effigies of my worthy Friend, the Author Master William Shakespeare, and his Workes," *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* (2nd Folio), 1632 (A5)

In the preceding pages I have tried to synthesize most of the available evidence for a claim we usually accept unreflectively – that early modern playgoing was governed by the democratic logic of social events rather than by that of textual, quasi-literary reception. It will seem, no doubt, that in pressuring this claim as far as possible, I have overstated its case: that all this evidence of audience participation remains exceptional to the rule (and does not, in sufficient quantity, at some point become the rule itself), and that I have neglected counterevidence of audiences behaving "well" – enjoying the play, appreciating the verisimilitude of the actors, and so forth. If this is not the same evidence we have already seen, of audiences marring the play as *coterminous* with their enjoyment of it, propelling themselves into the dramatic illusion when they did not altogether reject it, then it is a class of evidence – of audiences being, essentially, no longer "audiences" at all – to which we have simply not yet come. Rather, by comprehensively surveying what audiences empirically *did*, across all circumstances – booing, hissing, clapping, laughing, roaring, humming, whistling, stamping, crying, repeating, requesting, talking back to the actors, talking to each other, exiting early, entering late, "try[ing]," "search[ing]," judging, quarreling, food-throwing, "pressing" the stage, "drowning" the stage, physically *taking* the stage, one way or another – and seeing these forms of play-destroying as, ultimately, forms of play-making, we can follow that claim through to its somewhat less obvious conclusion: that the collaborative, dialogic nature of playgoing mandates a rethinking of the most basic discursive problems of early modern English

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theatre. We began with the question of how it became possible to speak of the "author" of a play, but perhaps the real question is how it became possible to speak of "plays" for there to be "authors" *of*.

Distinct from the classical, humanist, and morality drama of the pre-professional theatre, whose publications rhetoricize themselves as either anticipating performance (supplying cast lists, advice for the size and attire of troupes, duration, and even editing) or as altogether ignorant of it (as mere reading material, "treatises" in dramatic form), the commercial drama of the public playhouses *began* life in its performed state, swaddled in a living institution that rendered its *auctoritas* illegible and its formal identity plastic.[99] As we have seen, the play was not so much a commodity as a space for constructing one, and that commodity *was* the audience, the individual's self-fashioning in relation to others and the crowd's perception of itself as a whole. Richard Helgerson called this "the players' theater," but "players" – except as the term remained open to definition – clearly were not its key element.[100] To recognize this "audience's theatre," as we might instead name it, as "heteroglossic" does not mean we can quite call it "authorless," as Bakhtinian critics often claim.[101] Playgoers do not seem to have been partaking in a utopian carnival where speech lacked source, action lacked consequence, or individuality melted into anonymity – just ask the one who hit Tarlton with a pippin – but rather in an activity that tested the boundaries of these very categories, in dialectical opposition to the production onstage. Were the authority of early modern performance altogether dissolved, instead of merely dispersed, its concentration would pose no real challenge. The nature of playgoing, however, was not authorlessness, but a *superabundance* of authors: each one "covetous," seeking himself on stage and jockeying for possession of it, each one vying to impress herself upon the play, emphatically grounding performance in time and space.

If – as playgoers seem to have done – we take seriously such participation as acts of ownership, their vocalizations, disruptions, invasions, and destructions of the stage as imprinting upon performance an authorial stamp, then the publication of *every* playbook – *any* playbook – suddenly acquires a politics, regardless of whose name might appear on it. Whereas the New Textualist model materializes performance only up to the lip of the stage, distributing the authority of dramatic texts among all the agents of their production, to carry that project beyond the stage's edge – into the axis of reception – explodes the coherence of "production" itself, and so polarizes performance and print as to make them mutually unintelligible. If what the audience authorized was only a series of discrete

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performances, never realized identically twice, then how did they – not we, but *they* – homogenize the material in common to those performances as a single entity, as a "play"? How did an ownership that expressed itself by continuously warping its object tolerate the stabilization of that object in another medium, and here, moreover, under the aegis of the very agents against whom it competed? In order to ask how plays came to be thought of as originating from a writer, in other words, we must first explain how plays could be thought of as *terminating* in *writing itself*. How could an "audience's theatre," whose plural authorship intractably fragmented the identities of dramatic products and precluded their ability to be owned, yield to an "author's theatre," whose precondition – even more basic than its use of authors – was the reducibility of those products to *texts*?

Such a succession seems eventually to have occurred, and by this "eventually" there hangs a tale. The evidence for the ascendancy of the "author's theatre" is all around us: in the author-driven taxonomies and procedures we today use to regulate nearly all cultural production; in the "man and his works" ethos that structures our responses to and valuations of art, literature and theatre; most immediately for our purposes, in the early modern dramatic texts that survived to misrepresent the social practices which generated them. Histories of dramatic authorship – themselves products of their object of inquiry – have thus tended to cluster around its visible milestones, namely printed ones. Authorship registers on paper, so that is where we look for it. Accordingly, our histories have so far concerned purely bibliographic phenomena: the migration of authorial attribution, out of relative oblivion, first to title-page initials (e.g. R[obert]. W[ilson].'s *Three Ladies of London* (1584)), to end-text *explicit* (e.g. Peele's *Edward I* (1593)), to the sudden spike of full title-page ascriptions in 1594; the cosmetic emendations made by the printers of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1590) and Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (1592) to conform them to a "readerly logic" instead of a theatrical one; the construction of Shakespeare as an author between 1598 and 1600; the title pages of Jonson's *Every Man Out* (1600) and *Sejanus* (1605), each announcing their divergence from what had been "Publickely Spoken or Acted"; the title page to *Volpone* (1607), visually subordinating the title of the play to the author; the increased frequency of class-marked paratexts, like aristocratic dedications and commendatory verses; the gradual typographic shift from blackletter to roman, as well as the uses of Latin epigraphy, commonplacing, and continuous printing, indicative of the rising literary status of printed drama; the crossover of playwrights into more esteemed poetic modes (sonneteering, epyllion, translation), exemplified in the lyric anthologies of the early seventeenth

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century and by Chapman's *Whole Works of Homer* (1616); the imitation of this classical, biographically driven format by publications including commercial plays (Jonson's *Workes* (1616)), and later consisting exclusively of them (Shakespeare's *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* (1623)); the statistical drop-off to less than 10 percent of playbooks printed anonymously by the second decade of the seventeenth century; the steady, corresponding climb of playbooks acknowledging joint authorship and their acceptance of playwrights as historical subjects, culminating with Beaumont and Fletcher's *Works* in 1647.[102] These indices, of the emergence of an "author's theatre" where the play originates as writing, are as important as the sentence required to list them was long, and I am here dismissing neither their value nor that of the numerous studies that expound upon them. But to the core problem of the "author's theatre" we have been excavating – the textual representability of the play, which *enables* authorship of it – they are superficial. Whether our histories of dramatic authorship explain the appearance of authorial bylines as arbitrary demarcators of mercantile property zones, or as marketing strategies to give plays literary appeal (probably, both), does not finally matter. Insofar as they regard these bylines as marking the *inception* of a process rather than its terminus, they study merely the symptoms of that process, not the underlying pathology.

For evidence of this nascent "author's theatre," I would argue, we do not need to consult bylines, or title pages, or any of the changing topical features of playbooks. Every playbook was already latently "authorial" in its very form. In stark contrast to the textual conventions of genres like the masque or the civic pageant, whose past-tense inflections record (albeit selectively) historically specific events, the event-status of printed plays – uncomplicated by the repetitions of commercial performance – is utterly evacuated, along with the cumulative, constitutive contributions of their respective audiences. Hovering somewhere between imperative and indicative moods, the grammar of Elizabethan stage directions inhabits a kind of null present, indicating – with few exceptions – prescription, not action.[103] Only the thin membranes of prologues, epilogues, and title-page copy give the playbook access to the multifarious life in performance that lies behind it. It is equally indifferent to the lives that lie ahead of it: only two commercial plays printed after 1587 survive with cast lists suggesting the assignment of parts.[104] In 1571, the title page of *Damon and Pithias* still looks backward and forward to construct its sociology: its text is "*as the same* was played before the Queenes Maiestie" – a claim of historical exactitude reinforced by its proviso that "the prologue … is somewhat

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altered for the proper vse of them that hereafter shall haue occasion to plaie it, either in priuate, or open audience."[105] Later playbooks similarly advertise "as it was played before the Queenes [or King's] Maiestie," but no strict identity between text and occasion is here implied. "[A]s it was played" does not mean "*as the same* was played" – much less the perfunctory boilerplate "as it hath been sundrie times played," which makes no effort to fix the text relative to any one of those occasions, nor to any prior variant edition with which it may materially conflict. (When such attempts are made, the result is usually something like Q2 *Hamlet*'s muddled "newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was," which still references only the previous quarto.) Whatever gesture at theatrical provenance or textual integrity it might make, *every* early modern English printed playbook grammatically understands *its* verbal instantiation to be "the play," and "the play," in turn, an autotelic object comprised solely of such verbal instantiations.

A playbook does not even try, meanwhile, to preserve the random, heterogeneous, pluralistic totality of any single performance. It presents instead a temporally conflated and vocally streamlined version of what only the *players* said and did – or, rather, of what only *some* players *might* have said and done at some unknown juncture in the play's stage history. Quarto playbooks almost uniformly ignore, for instance, the act divisions that we know were a key structural feature of performance, let alone preserve the variegated material – inter-act music, sometimes dancing, and above all, as we will see in Chapter 2, stage clowning – that filled those interstices. Instead, with striking uniformity, they begin and end with markers of dramatic identity ("*Actus Primus, scæna prima*," and "*Finis*"), yet elide every break in between, suggesting an otherwise uninterrupted, unadulterated theatrical experience. Playbooks also ignore, at the same time as stealthily incorporating them, the often productive collaborations of their plays' audiences. It was apparently routine for poets to revise plays by redacting episodes playgoers found especially objectionable; performance sometimes solicited these improvements directly, indeed, as when the prologue to Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* (1602) asks its audience to "polish these rude Sceanes."[106] Yet playbooks in turn redacted the evidence of this co-authorship, and of the play's plasticity, publishing it as if it had originally existed and always been performed in exactly that state. Flattening the dialogue with the stage into a monologue of the page, removed from time, space, and contingency, printed playbooks are fossils of imaginary animals, the idealization into a perfect whole of that abstraction called "the play," merely what the players *intended* to perform on any

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given day – not how, or even whether, they actually did.[107] Playbooks do not just erase performance: they negate it, representing the play as if it happens only, or has already happened, on paper. Insofar as they transmitted verbal artifacts autonomous from their realization and from their audiences, *every* printed playbook differed, by definition, from what "hath been Publickely Spoken or Acted," and *every* playbook by definition already conforms to what Lukas Erne calls "readerly logic." That is to say, they make the reading of theatre possible.[108]

This logic dictates that a reader's experience, unlike a playgoer's, be dictated. Were the form of a playbook retentive of all the interference an audience could generate in a specific performance, it might look like *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, only with more speaking parts; were each performance, furthermore, invested with equal authority as a representation of the play, no two printings of this *Pestle*-like playbook would look even remotely the same – unless it could be done as hypertext, with every word a palimpsestic link to its variants. And even could such a theoretically infinite number of books be made, there would be no reason to purchase any of them, since readers, unlike playgoers, tend to value the social currency of a text over its uniqueness. What here arbitrates between, cancels out, and supplants the competing authorities of performance is, by process of elimination, the authority of the playing company itself, which alone remains constant across performances. Regardless of the degree to which the title page specifies them or their playhouse, "the book of the play" is always implicitly *their* play, not even so much because it was legally theirs to print, as because only "their" play *can* be printed. Well before the advent of the authorial names attached to it, the playbook was already a template for literary property. Despite the complicating, formative agency of the several new collaborators (scribe, stationer, censor, printer) necessary to achieve it, the act of textualizing a play after its performance automatically foreclosed on 99 percent of the agents with an authorial claim to those performed states. The creation of one "reader" – a persona, notably, almost always addressed as singular – implicitly un-created one, or two, or ten, or twenty thousand spectators.[109]

The inevitability of playbooks

Now, that "eventually": these satisfied readers and disenfranchised spectators were largely the same people.[110] There are good reasons for not taking this commonsense assumption as absolute demographic identity, of course. At sixpence, a playbook would have cost six times the lowest

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admission fee to amphitheatres such as the Fortune or the Rose – a considerable sum for those furthest down the socioeconomic ladder, who have been traditionally supposed the least literate segment of the audience for the same reason that they have also been supposed the most stridently participatory. (As David Cressy has argued, and as this study will later show, neither compartmentalization is as easy as we might like.)[111] Given the relatively small press runs of playbook quartos, hardly every playgoer could or did purchase them. Neither were publication patterns uniform, with a disproportionate number of plays from the ostensibly more upscale (and later) indoor theatres finding their way into print. To embrace the opposite extreme, however, and posit a dramatic readership wholly divorced from spectatorship, is simply untenable. That playbook title pages structure their information no differently whether the play hails from the Blackfriars or the Red Bull, for instance, tells us not that readers disidentified with playhouses in general, but that they may have attended them all interchangeably.[112] An assumed commutativity between readers and playgoers, indeed, is the whole motive for playbook title pages to provide playhouse information. The disproportionate survival of playbooks in aristocratic libraries (despite Sir Thomas Bodley's dismissal of them as "riffe-raffes"), similarly, tells us nothing other than that the nobility saw no scandal in buying printed plays – nor in frequenting playhouses – and that libraries are good places for books to survive.[113] For the rest of the playgoing public, meanwhile, not every reader of a book was its first purchaser or its last owner. The used book trade, informal circulation, and amateur performance would have gradually filtered playbooks down to lower-income patrons.[114] Second-hand use vastly multiplied the number of spectators who could access plays in printed form; one of the factors in the high loss rate of playbooks, indeed, may well have been that they were successively read to death.

While early modern plays almost never internally reference their future as books, the rhetoric of their printed paratexts points to a general expectation that the community which had consumed it in one medium was now its target market in the other. Richard Jones' *Tamburlaine* (1590), for instance, at the same time as addressing "the Gentleman readers: and others that take pleasure in reading Histories," troubles the very distinction between a "theatrical" and a "readerly" logic it is often used to mark, when Jones hopes that – by excising "some fond and friuolous Iestures … vaine conceited fondlings greatly gaped at, what times they were shewed vpon the stage in their graced deformities" – the two plays "wil be now no lesse acceptable vnto you to read … then they haue bene (lately) delightfull

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for many of you to see."[115] These "you"s are the same. Precisely because so "many" of *Tamburlaine*'s potential readers were also its spectators, what has always been considered Jones' aesthetic scrupling between reading and seeing here masks a practical concern for the rift between them – namely, the untranslatability into print of "Iestures" and "fondlings", whose necessary omission he spins as editorial choice. Jones's optimism about the class of his reader, furthermore – the same readers who as spectators found "delightfull" the play's "deformities" – has its plebeian counterparts elsewhere. Valentine Simmes' quarto of Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1600) addresses the same base citizenry at whom its performance was aimed, "all good Fellowes, Professors of the Gentle Craft; of what degree so euer," while Heywood dedicates *The Four Prentices of London* (1615) "to the honest and hie-spirited Prentises The Readers."[116]

Whosesoever politics a play might flatter onstage, its potential readership was wide enough to allow it to extend the same appeal to the page. Richard Hawkins pitches his 1628 edition of *Philaster* right at the play's prior audiences, looping performance and print into an endless encore that treats the two media as mutually substitutable:

> This Play so affectionately taken, and approoued by the Seeing Auditors, or Hearing Spectators, (of which sort, I take, or conceiue you to bee the greatest part) hath receiued (as appeares by the copious vent of two Editions,) no less acceptance with improouement of you likewise the Readers … the best Poems of this kind, in the first presentation, resemble that all-tempting Minerall newly digged up, the Actors being onely the labouring Miners, but you the skilfull Triers and Refiners: Now considering how currant this hath passed, under the infallible stamp of your iudicious censure and applause, and … eagerly sought for, not onely by those that haue heard and seene it, but by others that haue meerely heard thereof … (A2r–v)

Starting with playgoers, spreading outward to print and returning to a reinvigorated theatrical demand, Hawkins' market ranges from those who have "heard thereof" and wish to see, to those who have already "heard and seene" and wish to see again. That the object of their "Tr[ying]" and "Refin[ing]" now seems to have moved from the playhouse into the playbook, though, still begs the question of *why* playgoers would want the text of a play in the first place: what *uses* did it serve one who had already attended, or planned to attend, a performance? Nevertheless, by this time the fungibility of the two reception positions has become relatively unproblematic. In his epistle to *Catiline*, Jonson imagines his "Reader in Ordinarie" as recapitulating the judgment they brought to it as an ordinary playgoer: "you commend the two first Actes, with the people, because they

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are the worst; and dislike the oration of *Cicero*, in regard you read some pieces of it, at Schoole, and understand them not yet." Webster compares the fickle sensibility of Red Bull audiences to those of common readers, "resembl[ing] those ignorant asses (who visiting Stationers shoppes their use is not to inquire for good bookes, but new bookes.)"[117] For Beaumont, the quarto of Fletcher's *Faithfull Shepheardesse* is its "second publication," equivalent to re-performance; indeed, it is the *only* performance, since the first was mistrusted to actors "whose very reading makes verse senceless prose," meaning that "the people … saw it not." Those same people, he hopes, may now "see the thing they scornd."[118]

"Seeing" and "reading" are fast becoming indistinct terms: predicated on the demographic overlap of spectators and bookbuyers, playgoing can now be figured as mediated, textual practice and private study as immediate, visceral experience, each mode implicit in and supportive of the other.[119] By 1624, William Basse's puff for Massinger's *The Bond-Man* can go so far as to declare all performance merely mental rehearsal for the audience, to prepare them for the inward gratifications of the book:

> And (Reader) if you have disburs'd a shilling,
> To see this worthy STORY, and are willing
> To have a large encrease; (if rul'd by me)
> You may a MARCHANT, and a POET be.
> 'Tis granted for your twelue-pence you did sit,
> And *See*, and *Hear*, and *Understand* not yet.
> The AUTHOR (in a Christian pitty) takes
> Care of your good, and Prints it for your sakes.
> That such as will but venter Six-pence more,
> May *Know*, what they but *Saw*, and *Heard* before.[120]

In the same idealist vein, James Shirley would tell prospective purchasers of Beaumont and Fletcher's 1647 *Works* to "congratulate thy owne happinesse, that in this silence of the Stage, thou hast a liberty to read these inimitable Playes … which were only shewd our fathers in a conjuring glasse."[121] Whatever audiences were being "rul'd by" in order to "*Turne reader*," as Leonard Digges put it in 1640, it was probably not the condescensions of people like Basse, or the ministrations of prefatory matter buried too deep within a playbook to influence its sale. Yet playgoers increasingly bought playbooks anyway. Just *why* they did so, given the overwhelming and simultaneous evidence for playgoing as an irresolubly collaborative, improvisatory, interactive pastime, is perhaps the most crucial – and complex – question in early modern English theatre history.[122]

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From 1576 to 1593, a total of just twenty professional plays were printed, barely one per year; eight of those years featured no commercial dramatic publications at all. In 1594 alone, however, fully eighteen new plays were published, seven of which went to second editions by 1600. For the next two decades the trade averaged roughly thirteen playbooks per year, and as Alan Farmer and Zachary Lesser have shown, despite periodic fluctuation they remained far more popular, and reliably profitable, than their raw market share once suggested.[123] Stressing that "the market for playbooks had to be created," Farmer and Lesser nevertheless locate this demand on the supply side of the equation – with the stationers' discovery after 1594 that "plays were suddenly selling very well," leading to second editions and the confidence to produce more firsts.[124] We thus have a demand-side theory without a theory: understandably, since the best evidence of demand is supply. Precisely *for* its "suddenness," indeed – *because* London bookbuyers in 1594 "might well have been surprised to find a play from the professional theaters among their choices" – the dormant appetite this glut awakened becomes all the more puzzling, and hard to originate within a bookbuying mindset not already structured by prior playgoing activity.[125]

Tiffany Stern moves us closer to an answer, by bringing early modern print and performance into more direct, physical contact. Given the evidence for the sale of books and pamphlets inside the walls of playhouses themselves, and "given that published plays anticipate being read by spectators, often the very spectators that watched the piece in the first place," she concludes that "playhouse sale of playbooks seems highly likely," and proceeds to consider its implications:

> the possibility is then raised that a theater audience might be partly shaped to and by printed playtexts that they bought in the theater … if playbooks *were* sold in playhouses then the paper potential of the performed text will always have been felt by the audience. The "book" will have seemed what the play was likely to become next – while the enacted play will never have become entirely separated in kind, at least in the mind of the watchers, from a written one.[126]

This is still a supply-side explanation, yet a richer one. No longer must the playgoer go to the bookshop in order to make the connection between the performed play and its printed version; on this theory, the printed version came to the playhouse, and made that connection for them. But still, how? Proximity is not superposition: unless the copies on sale were of the same play being enacted that day – and even then, since one would have to follow along to discover *that* it was the same play, or rather a

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completely different and denuded one under the same title – the playgoer must already grasp what a playbook is and means, and *want* to buy or read one. Stern's playgoers already understand this: if, in her words, they are merely "watchers" of the play, then it is for them already implicitly a written text.[127] I think we can go one step further, by going one step further back. Let us imagine a playhouse altogether without playbooks: how might it invent them? What if its interpenetration with textual practice had to occur not just near the stage, but on it? To have books inside the theatres, did theatre as a whole first have to be inside a book?

And thus, a paradox. If sheer supply could not create the legibility of playbooks, what could, but the very performance conditions that also militated against it? How did dramatic texts establish a conversibility with performance, except *through* performance? Where else could playgoers learn that a play could be a book, except at plays themselves – the very *last* place one might expect to learn this? A playbook can never make itself like the live experience of theatre: it is an inanimate object, incapable of interaction, and even its rhetoric is one of fixity, of morphological arrest. Performance, on the other hand, is mutable, its assumptions, procedures, and conventions subject to gradual change. This asks performance itself to become inanimate too, a proposition which its principal agents – its audiences – would intuitively, and (as we have seen) incessantly did, reject. So how could they be, and how were they, persuaded to accept it? Before any cachet attached to printed drama, and before local reading cultures assimilated it to new uses, why did playgoers purchase textual renditions of an experience that completely betrayed the fiber of that experience? How could they countenance the implication – being made explicitly by 1624 – that the organizing principles of their entertainment were illegitimate, that the sensorium of theatre was an illusion, and that its true substance was to be found on pieces of paper impervious to confrontation? If what audiences demanded was "suffrage," to "act their parts," why did they spend money on versions of plays that rendered those parts unacted, that edited them out – asserting, as blankly as the white space on its pages, that they did not count?

The only answer thus far advanced to these questions is as elegant as it is evasive of them: that no such relation obtained between performance and text – that we are being perversely literal about this, and that (to quote Stephen Orgel) "if the play is a book, it's not a play."[128] While a useful precaution for us as modern editors, it does not bear on the mentality of those early modern playgoers who were being invited to attend performances and then to buy texts of them as modules of a single cultural activity.

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David Scott Kastan reminds us that the text of a play and its performance "are materially and theoretically distinct," with neither "more or less authentic than the other," but this is true only in the present tense. In their *original* sequence, where a play's performance always preceded its textualization, the fact that playbooks "deny performance altogether" becomes more than just an academic crux. It meant the erasure of history.[129]

Against the hypothesis that playbooks merely advertised future productions or revivals, finally, stands the fact that no playbook ever actually claims this much; if they did, we might reasonably expect at least one to say so.[130] The closest we come to proof of the playbook's advertising function, indeed, returns us to *The Roaring Girl*: in their preface to the quarto, Middleton and Dekker hope that it "may bee allowed both Gallery roome at the Play-house, and chamber-roome at your lodging."[131] If the printed version is meant to get playgoers into the playhouse, however, the performed version behaves as though that book does not exist. The same spectators who bring a copy of the play in their hands – a text that should delimit performance – will also, as we have seen, instantly find themselves being accused of "bring[ing] a play in's head" as well. Why did Middleton and Dekker think that audiences, who would know from the playbook what to expect, would forget what was expected of them once they got to the playhouse? Operative here seems to be a kind of mutual disregard: if playgoers understood the articulation of performance and text enough to buy books that ignored them, they also understood the disjunction between performance and text enough to ignore those books in kind.

Theatre, then, comes to exist during the period in at least two related but discrete states. The play *was* a book, since most of those who bought playbooks were playgoers, either past or future. The play was also still *not* a book, since its textuality appears not to have curtailed participation during performance. The former is what needs explaining, but it cannot be explained without the latter. This, I think, is what has kept histories of dramatic authorship thus far segregated from histories of performance: their contradictory narratives are never forced to intersect. By reading only the apparata of printed plays, one can tell the story of early modern drama as a rise of reading; by reading around them, conversely, one can tell the same story as a static history of vibrant, defiant commoning. Neither synthesizes the evidence to unravel how the two phenomena can coexist, braided around each other yet separate. The reception evidence we have surveyed in this chapter spans the entirety of the Elizabethan and early Stuart period, continuing until the closure of the theatres and beyond. Yet while audiences asserted their presence by destroying plays

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and on occasion even playhouses, for their textual dispossession there is no record of anyone's ever burning, protesting, or even refusing to purchase a playbook. Indeed, in the one documented instance where an audience undertook to produce a playbook itself – transcribing Heywood's *If You Know Not Me*, where "some by Stenography … put it in print" – Heywood tells us that they only "drew / The Plot."[132] Not the *performance*, in other words, which included them, but merely the *text*, which did not. Without needing to be told, they instinctively deleted themselves.

The ritual practices of the "audience's theatre" would endure for decades, "the play" conflating representational drama and improvised contest, soliloquy and heckle, player and auditor. And yet, *from within* it, grew an "author's theatre" that enforced these discriminations when "the play" reached the page. That paradox is the heart of this study. Before the figure of the playwright could emerge to consolidate and accelerate theatrical experience as a reading experience, "ownership" of theatrical production had to mean different things in different domains, and we need a more expansive, nuanced account of what – and how – "authorship" itself could mean in order to underwrite the bibliographic spaces in which it would eventually coalesce. Behind the history of dramatic authorship, that is, lies a more nebulous prehistory of theatrical individuation. Even as they went on disputing performance, by purchasing playbooks that turned those performances into paper, playgoers seem instinctively to have recognized that "theatre" possessed an innate authority *other* than theirs – an authority that predated and transcended performance, and that *originated* on paper as well. They first had to recognize, in other words, the existence of the one piece of paper they could never see: the script.

In this chapter I have tried to show that a history of how theatre became readable, and readable as already written, is larger than the paper on which its texts were printed. The authority inscribed in the playbook must trace to something outside and prior to the playbook itself, since playbooks needed playgoers to buy them. Rather, it must ultimately be grounded in the institution that spawned both, creating not only texts to be purchased, but the very people to purchase them. To print a playbook was not enough to make a play a book; that had to happen in and to the nature of performance itself, which is where the audience was. And where the audience was, so was the clown.

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