METATHEATRICALITY ON THE RENAISSANCE STAGE, THE AUDIENCE AND THE MATERIAL SPACE

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Shiladitya Sen
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Examining Committee Members:

Shannon Miller, Advisory Chair, English, Temple University
Eli Goldblatt, English, Temple University
Robert Storey, English, Temple University
Teresa Soufas, External Reader, Spanish and Portuguese, Temple University

ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines how early modern metatheater enabled the Renaissance stage and its original audience to develop a complex and symbiotic relationship. Metatheater—by which I mean a particular mode of theatre, in which actors, playwrights, dramatic characters and/or (in particular) audiences express or share a perception of drama as a fictional and theatrical construct—pervaded Renaissance drama, not by simple happenstance but arising almost inevitably from the complex context within which it functioned. The early modern stage was a particularly conflicted forum, which monarchs and playwrights, town fathers and actors, censors and audiences, impresarios and anti-theatricalists, all strove to influence and control. The use of the metatheatrical mode allowed playwrights and players to better navigate this difficult, sometimes dangerous, space. In particular, the development of Renaissance metatheater derived from (and, simultaneously, affected) the unique nature of its original spectators, who practiced a much more actively engaged participation in the theater than is often recognized. Performers and playwrights regularly used metatheatricality to adapt to the needs and desires of their audience, and to elicit the intellectual and emotional responses they desired.

My study utilizes a historically contextualized approach that emphasizes the material conditions under which Renaissance drama arose and functioned. It begins by examining the influence of the surrounding milieu on the Renaissance stage and its spectators, especially its facilitation of the development and use of metatheater. Traces of such influence are evidenced via varied historical texts, such as play prologues and epilogues, legal documents, and playgoer

experiences expressed in prose and verse. Then, via close readings of four plays—Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*—the dissertation indicates how varied and versatile early modern metatheater was, and how it responded to and influenced the nature of its audiences. My study demonstrates the centrality of metatheater to early modern theatrical practice, delineates its pervasive influence on the stage-audience relationship in Renaissance theaters, and underlines the influence of material conditions on the creation and dissemination of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The genesis of the term "metatheatre" can be quite precisely located, occurring in Lionel

Abel's *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (1963). Its definition and application,

however, are far thornier matters, having been severely complicated by the various uses of the

term (and related ones, such as metadrama or metaplay, which some critics treat as virtually the

same and others as distinctly separate concepts) ever since it first appeared. Abel's own broadly

general and idiosyncratic view of the concept has hardly helped matters, simultaneously allowing

and impelling those who followed him (whether chronologically or in spirit) to stretch the

concept in varied, sometimes even contradictory, directions till there sometimes appears to be

almost no commonality on the subject. Some scholars, such as Thomas Rosenmeyer, have

argued that the term should simply be discarded, since it has "been employed to cover too many

different moves, and to elicit responses that undervalue the traditional inventiveness and the

wonderful immediacy of the emotional power of theater … 'Metatheater' has been such an

obstruction [to enlightenment], where it is not simply an uninformative frill" (119). As this

study—*Metatheatricality on the Renaissance Stage, the Audience and the Material Space*—

indicates, I do not consider it a concept without merit and contend, rather, that it can still be very

effectively utilized, including in areas that have seen relative neglect by earlier scholars. Before

outlining such positions and aims, however, one should begin with a quick coverage of some

past uses of the term in the interests of precision and to avoid at least some of the pitfalls that

Rosenmeyer notes.

Abel's definition is, of course, the place to start. In *Metatheatre*, Abel argues that tragedy is difficult, if not impossible, for modern playwrights to write. Shakespeare, for example, only writes one play, *Macbeth*, that he considers a genuine tragedy. Instead, Abel argues, Shakespeare and many subsequent dramatists tend towards plays that "tell us at once that the happenings and characters in them are of the playwright's invention, and that insofar as they were discovered … they were found by the playwright's imagining rather than by his observing the world" (59). He characterizes plays in this unique genre as having "a common character: all of them are theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized" and argues that the "persons appearing on the stage in these plays … themselves knew they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them" (60). Abel contrasts such works with tragedy and dubs them a separate genre: "metaplays, works of metatheatre" (61). The issue of characters being self-aware of their theatricality is particularly important to his definition, leading to his characteristically idiosyncratic argument that the ultimate metatheatrical character is actually not in a play, being Cervantes' Don Quixote.

Abel was coining a term to name what existed long before him and, thus, was hardly the only person studying the subject. Anne Righter, for example, publishing a year before Abel, explores the metaphor of the world as a stage in her *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (1962). Righter lays especial emphasis on the actor-audience relationship. She draws a line of development from the earlier mystery plays, which she views as heavily influenced by the audience's presence and nature, to the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama that follows, where she says playwrights imbue their plays with individual self-contained identities, from which actors sometimes can reach out to the audience, but only "as the result of stage convention, not through conscious intention on the part of the speaker" (61). For Righter, Renaissance drama (especially

later, in the Jacobean and Caroline periods) is progressively more focused on illusion and mimesis than the earlier forms, a position generally rejected by later criticism (and my study).

Ever since Abel's book appeared, scholars have used and interpreted the term in such hugely varied ways that simply enumerating and describing them would fill this entire volume. Hence, I shall delineate only a few key critics and texts that are especially important in this regard, particularly in the area of Renaissance metatheater. James Calderwood's *Shakespearean Metadrama* (1971) is one such, slightly borrowing and mostly diverging from Abel. He is willing to accept, like Abel, that metatheater is a "dramatic genre that does go beyond drama (at least drama of a traditional sort), becoming a kind of anti-form in which the boundaries between the play as a work of self-contained art and life are dissolved" (4), but sets up metadrama as a larger category, metatheatre being a species of the genus. Calderwood's 'metadrama' is an expansive concept, involving any preoccupation within a play with the nature of drama itself, especially the process of writing plays. Focusing on Shakespeare, Calderwood argues that "dramatic art itself— its materials, its media of language and theater, its generic forms and conventions, its relationship to truth and the social order—is a dominant Shakespearean theme, perhaps his most abiding subject" (5). Calderwood's formulation of metadrama and approach to Shakespeare already provide strong evidence of the myriad directions in which the term would be taken and applied by different scholars, with even more proof furnished by his later work, *Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad* (1978). Here, he considers the reflexive aspects of the tetralogy beginning with *Richard II* and ending in *Henry V*, arguing that the plays display a questioning of the nature of speech. Calderwood sees a distinct movement from Richard II, who fails to effectively understand and use language, through the usurper Bolingbroke (who reigns as Henry IV), who manipulates words to gain power, to Henry V, who unites words and truth via

intelligent use of metaphor. Despite the book's title, metadrama here is much less of a genuine concern and more of a tool to understanding thematic treatments of history, power and, especially, language in the *Henriad*.

Less than a decade later, Richard Hornby's *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (1986) makes the intriguing contention that all drama is at least partly metadramatic. Eschewing the realistic/unrealistic dyad as inappropriate for the discussion of drama, he argues that plays do not reflect some external reality but only themselves, since "drama is not a mirror held up to nature, but rather a gauge" (27). Hornby uses the phrase "drama/culture complex" to describe the broad context within which plays are composed, arguing that all drama functions in relation to this complex rather than to actual reality (which he contrasts with the drama/culture complex), with the finest plays using metadrama to explore, challenge and parody it. In fact, for Hornby, all "great drama is *parody*, but it is a parody of a complex and serious nature. In parodying the perceived dramatic tradition, the serious playwright is attacking and ultimately altering the means by which people think, behave, and decide" (25). In order to explicate these ideas, Hornby provides a structuralist listing of six different types or components of metadrama—the play within the play, ceremony within the play, role playing within the role, references to literature and to real life within the play, and self-references within the play. The book's last third consists of a consideration of the theme of perception in six plays, beginning with Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, and ending with Pinter's *Betrayal*.

Judd Hubert, in his *Metatheater: The Example of Shakespeare* (1991), opposes the performative (which he connects to the "fable") and the mimetic (which he links to the "medium"), focusing especially on the former. His study of Shakespearean metatheater features a "performative as opposed to a mimetic approach, based to a large extent on emphasizing

linguistic signs that, in addition to communicating developments in plot and characterization, explicitly or implicitly designate the art of stagecraft and entertainment" (1). For Hubert, the performative and mimetic elements of a drama are often opposed, with the former threatening to disrupt the latter and bringing the formal and structural elements of theatricality to the fore. In general, he elevates the performative elements over the mimetic and, in practice, tends to largely restrict his examination of the performative to the use of metaphor.

While these five scholars are only a few important representatives of an engagement with metatheatre that is now half a century old, there are connective threads within their work which represent large movements common to such scholarship. One is the general emphasis on poetics over theatre in such analyses. Even studies which appear to be overtly focused on performance (e.g. Hubert) tend to rely more on linguistic and rhetorical performance (as evidenced in his focus on metaphor or Calderwood's emphasis on language) than on stage performance. In a related vein, the role of the audience has been relatively downplayed in such studies, Righter being one of the few scholars of early modern metatheatre to focus heavily on the audience. Hornby's work provides an interesting example of this tendency. Perception is a major focus of his study, but his work almost exclusively focuses on the treatment of perception as a theme in the plays rather than on audience perception. In keeping with the relative de-emphasis on performance, the contextual conditions under which Renaissance theatre functioned are usually not a primary concern of such scholarship. Righter, for example, despite her emphasis on the relationship between audience and actor, has relatively limited consideration of how their interaction was mediated by physical and other elements (staging in the round, the composition of Renaissance acting companies, censorship, etc.). Lastly, the prevalence of Shakespeare in the listed works is not coincidental. Beginning with Abel, studies of early modern metatheatre have

centered very heavily on him, implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) presenting Shakespeare as

the epitome of Renaissance metatheatre and perhaps a unique practitioner of it. As Joanne

Rochester, one of the few who focuses on a different playwright's (Philip Massinger) use of

metatheatre, sums up while casting an eye over the earlier scholarship, most studies in the field

"focus exclusively on Shakespeare and treat 'metatheatre' as a metaphor for the wider play of

reality and illusion in poetics" (9). These omissions seem particularly odd since metatheatre as a

concept has been applied increasing widely since Abel's time, spreading well beyond the English

Renaissance to classical Greek and Roman drama in the past and nineteenth and twentieth

century drama in the future, as well as to the roughly concurrent Golden Age Spanish theatre and

drama of the Italian Renaissance.

Connections between metatheatre and performance (rather than poetics) are more likely

to be found, if often only obliquely, in the more recent performance-oriented criticism and

theatre history. Alan Dessen's *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (1995), for one,

examines how clues in playtexts indicate what early modern audiences would actually have seen

in performance. His arguments for how early modern audiences might have been guided in their

responses by the words and actions of onstage spectators are particularly important in this

context. Similarly, Martin White's *Renaissance Drama in Action* (1998) discusses how early

modern playwrights "ensured that audiences were alert both to the nature of the fiction presented

before them and its correspondences to their own world—to the theatricality of everyday life"

(95), through detailed analyses of stage performance which are particularly apropos to

examinations of metatheatre, even though metatheatre is not a particular interest of White's (or

Dessen's) text. Many of Andrew Gurr's books on the history of Renaissance drama, while not

primarily focused on metatheatre, presuppose its existence and provide valuable evidence regarding the conditions under which it functioned.

My study seeks to draw upon such pre-existing scholarship in providing an approach to metatheatre which has been comparatively neglected. However, before establishing the aims of my study, I should pause for a brief moment of definition. In the rest of this study, when I use the term 'metatheater' I intend it to mean a particular mode (not a separate genre), where actors, playwrights, dramatic characters and/or (in particular) audiences express or share a perception of drama as a fictional and theatrical construct. As the title and the following contents of *Metatheatricality on the Renaissance Stage* illustrate, I particularly emphasize theatricality, i.e. the performative aspect of metatheater, especially as performed on stage. This element is what, in my estimation, separates metatheater from metafiction in general. And, I would argue, from metadrama too, which I see as already in existence on the page and within a play that is being read, whereas metatheater (or at least the form of it that I am exploring) must inevitably occur in performance upon the stage. My spelling of 'metatheater' is in part to emphasize my focus on performance within the theater (the physical building within which the stage is housed) and in part to separate my terminology from Abel's original formulation.

The central aim of my study is to establish how metatheater enabled the Renaissance stage and its original audience to develop a complex and symbiotic relationship. Playwrights and players, I contend, used the metatheatrical mode as a response to the unique nature of their spectatorship, which practiced a more actively engaged participation in the theater than is often recognized. The use of the metatheatrical mode allowed performers and writers to adapt to the needs and desires of their audiences, while also enabling them to elicit the intellectual and emotional responses they desired. In short, my study examines how the practice of early modern

metatheatricality arose from and heavily mediated the stage-audience relationship in Renaissance theaters, particularly the actively engaged nature of the spectatorship. To effectively achieve this aim and to avoid the omissions pointed to in the earlier scholarship, *Metatheatricality* utilizes a historically contextualized approach. Hence, my study closely examines, to borrow Hornby's phrase, the influence of the drama/culture complex within which the Renaissance stage and its spectators functioned. In order to understand *how* early modern metatheater existed, one must understand *why* it did, and virtually every element that impinged on Renaissance drama inflected (and, I contend, contributed to) the rise of metatheater in this period. To that end, I study the stage-audience relationship not in isolation but within its particular historical and theatrical setting, delineating how the world within which Renaissance theatre functioned facilitated and impelled the development and use of metatheater.

Chapter 2 lays the groundwork of my study by situating early modern metatheater squarely within the particular context in which it existed and flourished. I contend that Renaissance metatheatricality arose, near inevitably, from the complex confluence of forces which came to bear on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages. Since it is impossible to adequately cover all of the influences at play, my study delineates some representative factors and explicates how they specifically affected the development and nature of early modern metatheater. The ambiguous nature and newly-gained status of the chameleon players, capable of straddling multiple positions in society and in the theater, made them a perfect metaphor for ambiguity on the stage, facilitating the popular use of the character-as-player. The anti-theatricalist criticism of the theaters as sources for social corruption and a forum for performing falsehood impelled playwrights to emphasize the fictional and performative nature of their art, eschewing claims to mimetic truth and pretensions to realistic representation. The physical nature and limitations of

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the Renaissance theaters worked against realistic performances, causing playwrights and players to adapt to the exigencies of the spaces they worked within and openly admit the fictionality (and theatricality) of their enterprise. These material spaces also mediated the effect of the early modern audiences on the drama, and vice versa. Trained to active—often obstreperous— awareness via the forums the theaters resembled and physically situated (circling the stage, for one) so as to make their presence particularly felt to both the other spectators and the players, the audiences militated against a reliance on a silent and passive suspension of disbelief. With their presence impossible to ignore, playwrights and players directly addressed the audience, incorporating their presence and responses into the metatheatrical mode of drama. Other elements that were conventional in early modern drama, such as the doubling of roles or the popularity of a closing jig, also contributed in their own way to the use of the mode.

As the above should indicate, Chapter 2 draws heavily on primary sources from the Renaissance to delineate how early modern drama may have been conceived of, presented and apprehended in its own time. Unfortunately, a lack of primary evidence from playgoers about their thoughts and immediate responses to the plays before them leaves the issue of audience response somewhat conjectural. Visitors to the theater such as Thomas Platter provide more in the way of factual evidence than interpretive responses. Hence, I turn to three individuals— Simon Forman, Robert Tofte and John Davies of Hereford—who did write in some detail of their responses to plays that they saw, extrapolating and developing the implications in their work (diaries in Forman's case and poems by the others). While they provide divergent attitudes and levels of appreciation for theatre, all three individuals express a sense that they are free to interpret and mold what they experienced to express their own personalized ideas, with little emphasis on the theatre as mimetic. The contextual and historical analysis in this chapter

indicates the varied network of forces that influenced the development of early modern drama and their strong contribution to the role and effect of metatheater within it, setting the backdrop for the close reading and contextual analysis in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3 is the first of three chapters that focus on individual plays, analyzing the functioning of metatheater within them and, especially, what it can tell us about the nature of the plays' creations and reception in their own time. They also serve to provide some indication of the ubiquity of early modern metatheater, since the metatheatrical mode appears in a vast number of plays and playwrights from the period. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is a particularly appropriate spot to begin, its powerful metatheatricality and popularity throughout the course of the Renaissance serving to indicate how profitable the deployment of metatheater could be. Kyd's drama displays many metatheatrical techniques which would become standard in future plays, such as a metatheatrical framing structure (the Ghost and Andrea), multiple plays within the play (the dumb shows, multiple minor performances, and Hieronimo's *Soliman and Perseda*), and the popular figure of the protagonist-as-player (Hieronimo, who is a playwright to boot). The play also metatheatrically explores subjects that would become popular in future Renaissance drama, especially in the genre of revenge tragedy—the unreliability of state justice, the temptation and problematic nature of revenge, and the problem of effective communication with the audience (on stage and in the real world). Most important of all, in my analysis, is the manner in which *The Spanish Tragedy* explores the relationship between the staged play and daily performance in the lives of the spectators in the *theatrum mundi* (the world as theater) beyond the stage. Kyd's play emphasizes the need for keen awareness and accurate judgment on the spectators' part while paradoxically delineating the difficulty (perhaps even impossibility) of achieving such judgment in the complex world that his audiences inhabit.

Chapter 4 turns, as so many previous scholars of metatheater have done, to Shakespeare. Unlike most such studies, however, I do not seek to present him as a unique artist whose usage of metatheater represents its ultimate manifestation in the Renaissance. Rather, I situate him firmly within the theatrical and historical context in which he wrote, considering him a representative example of an early modern playwright deploying metatheater in varied ways in multiple plays, to the primary end of seeing his works successfully and profitably performed on the stage. The Shakespearean plays I have chosen to focus on are *Henry V* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, two that are rarely considered in close conjunction. The apparent differences in the plays are valuable, since they serve to show how versatile a tool early modern metatheatricality was in the hand of skilled playwrights and players. Furthermore, these two plays intersect in complementary ways. My study places especial emphasis on their use of a popular Renaissance character type—the monarch as actor. This was a particularly rich but also risky subject to utilize, since the monarch on the stage inevitably drew comparisons to the one on the throne, a fact that was evident to audiences, the state censors and the ruler herself (as Elizabeth I's famous comment on Richard II indicates). The potential for both aesthetic and radical use made the monarch-as-player both an enticing and a dangerous choice for playwrights to use.

In *Henry V* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare uses this figure to simultaneously express subtly subversive ideas and present a comprehensively metatheatrical image of acting and performance. Contemporary depictions of Henry V saw him as the perfect English warrior-king, while Cleopatra was portrayed as a duplicitous oriental siren rightly defeated by Roman morality. In the plays, Shakespeare overtly retains such depictions, but each play subtly indicates a different subtext, one tied heavily into issues of performance. Beneath the apparent surface, Henry appears to potentially be a Machiavellian monarch who uses powerful rhetoric to

manipulate both allies and foes, while Cleopatra becomes a powerful, self-willed ruler whose

performances allow her to transcend her enemies' power. Between them, the two characters also

enable a multilayered exploration of the dangers of performance. *Henry V* displays the power of

theatrical ability in the hands of a skilled actor, who can use it to manipulate an unthinking

audience as he desires, while *Antony and Cleopatra* reveals the plight of the actor facing a

hostile audience, whose antipathy paints their performance in a perpetually negative light.

Chapter 5 considers a particularly fascinating case—Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of

the Burning Pestle*, arguably the most metatheatrically rich Renaissance play and one which

failed spectacularly on its first appearance. The play is conventionally seen as satirizing the

fictional audience of the Citizen and his Wife. George and Nell seat themselves on the

Blackfriars stage and interfere consistently in the play's performance with their kibitzing and the

interpolated scenes featuring their apprentice Rafe as the Knight of the Burning Pestle. Various

critics have argued that this satire backfired on the play in some manner, either due to the

presence of too many citizens in the audience, the lack of higher class characters to identify with,

or the audience's inability to comprehend the play's sophisticated irony. In contrast, I contend

that the play's deployment of metatheatricality, dazzling though it is, paradoxically contributed

to its initial rejection by the audience.

The Knight uses the fictional audience of George and Nell to explore the nature of early

modern theatre, performance and spectatorship. One of its primary methods to achieve such

metatheatrical exploration is by testing and collapsing the boundaries between seemingly

separated categories, such as stage (and tiring house) and offstage area, audience and players,

illusion and reality. The expansiveness and progressively outward movement in such techniques,

however, serves to transform George and Nell into the sole representatives of the audience

surrounding them, causing the play's criticism of them to function as a criticism of theater audiences in general. The play's original audience, trained to active awareness by the nature of Renaissance theatre and noting the overt metatheatricality of *The Knight*, naturally responded negatively to such a critique, leading to the play's initial failure. A close reading of the play's use of metatheater, particularly in the form of the two citizens and with regard to the specific nature of the Blackfriars stage upon which it was first performed, reveals exactly how complex the varied practices of early modern metatheatricality were. The early modern stage was a highly contested space, where players and audiences, playwrights and anti-theatricalists, acting troupes and government censors, struggled to assert control. Renaissance metatheater was a vitally important tool in the hand of playwrights, who used it to attempt safe navigation of this complex arena, while seeking to create aesthetically and financially successful work.

In many ways, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, creative and sophisticated though it is, better represents the nature of Renaissance theatre and the key role of metatheater within it due to its original failure. Renaissance playwrights and players did not use metatheatrical material thoughtlessly or by happenstance. Rather, they were driven to rely heavily upon it due to the unique exigencies under which they created and performed their craft, especially the material conditions of staging and the social and cultural contexts which affected the audiences that attended their plays. The result was a symbiotic and often fraught relationship, where the presence of demanding and active spectators required difficult choices of those performing before them, and the responses of the playwrights and players simultaneously counted on and adapted to the active engagement of their audiences. The lens of metatheater is vital to an understanding of how theatre functioned under such conditions, since it is through the

metatheatrical mode that Renaissance drama speaks most clearly of the original conditions of its creation and reception.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MATERIALS OF METATHEATRICALITY

From the genesis of Renaissance drama to the closing of the theaters in 1642, metatheater was intrinsic to Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline theatre. The general volume and specific nature of the metatheatrical modes on display are among the most distinctive elements of early modern drama, and must be considered and accounted for when we seek to comprehend its production and perception within its own time. The growth and ubiquity of metatheater was not simple happenstance, but arose inexorably from the material conditions within which Renaissance theatre flourished. A wide and multifaceted network of elements contributed, directly and indirectly, to such metatheatricality—the creation of licensed theatrical troupes and the complicated social status of actors and playwrights; the construction of permanent physical structures dedicated primarily or solely to theatre, for the first time in British history (and how they drew upon existing physical structures, such as inns and great halls); the physical nature of the Renaissance stage (the overall shape and components, lighting, acoustics, and the contents of the theaters around it); the constant criticism and concerns about the theatre evinced by divergent groups (suspicion about their subject matter and censorship by state and Crown; accusations of immorality and licentiousness by religious figures; fear of social disruption and economic unrest by the city leaders of London); the audiences for early modern drama and their relationship with theatre (cultural, social, economic and aesthetic preconceptions they brought with them; their physical placement and behavior in the theaters); and many others.

The constant use of the metatheatrical mode by Renaissance playwrights was an (often, but not always, intentional) attempt—often overt and sometimes more subtle—to deal with and

adapt to the aforementioned factors. These elements rendered the stage a particularly complex and contested space for playwrights and players to navigate, one where metatheater was a useful and virtually inevitable avenue to pursue. While this study (in particular this chapter) will touch upon all of these contextual factors in its consideration of Renaissance metatheater, what I shall particularly emphasize is the symbiotic connection between metatheater and the stage-audience relationship. The metatheatrical mode in early modern drama simultaneously developed from and led to a particular interaction between players and audiences. It relied not on a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the spectators (a concept often anachronistically and inaccurately applied to Renaissance drama), but rather a much more multifaceted and actively participatory interaction with the performances they experienced.

I shall consider this relationship between audience and performance in the context of the aforementioned material conditions within which Renaissance drama existed, since they are inextricably linked, with the surrounding framework of stage, theater and society always mediating performance and perception. After laying out some of the bases and underpinnings for this relationship between players and audiences, I shall focus in subsequent chapters on four representative plays—Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, William Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. A detailed analysis of the functioning of metatheatrical modes within each play should serve to indicate precisely why an awareness of such elements is vital to an accurate understanding of Renaissance theatre in the world within which it existed, especially the stages on which it was performed and the audiences which viewed it.

The position of the players

One element that rendered the Renaissance stage a particularly complex and contested space was the ambiguity in the position of the players who occupied it, occasioned by the combination of concern and approbation which their actions caused and by shifts in their legal and social status over the period in question. The history of the status of actors in early modern England is far too long for such a study to cover in detail, but even a cursory examination indicates the complexity of the subject.

Before the establishment of permanent physical theaters and the London acting companies, the sixteenth century English actor was likely a peripatetic figure, regularly traveling and performing at diverse locations. A lucky few formed troupes which gained patronage from social superiors such as nobles and magistrates, but the relative paucity of performances which their patrons called for meant these players too often supplemented their income by traveling performances, moving from the hall of a great house to the yard of an inn as needed. In an age when social stability and clear class demarcation were valorized just as much as (and because) they were regularly tested, the itinerant player was a significantly troubling figure, one who might as easily be a noble servant as a rogue (and sometimes both).

Inevitably, the English government attempted to bring this problematical phenomenon under control on multiple occasions. One of the most important attempts occurred on June 29, 1572, in the "Acte for the punishement of Vacabondes and for Relief of the Poore & Impotent," which proclaimed:

> … all Fencers Bearewardes Comon Players in Enterludes & Minstrels, not belonging to any Baron of this Realme or towardes any other honorable Personage of greater Degree; all juglers Pedlars Tynkers and Petye Chapmen; whiche seid Fencers Bearewardes Comon Players in Enterludes Mynstrels Juglers Pedlers Tynkers & Petye Chapmen, shall wander abroad and have not Lycense of two Justices of the Peace at the leaste, whereof one to be of the Quorum, when and in what Shier they shall happen to wander ... shalbee

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taken adjudged and deemed Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggers. (qtd. in Chambers, IV, 270)

The results of the "Act" were far-reaching. Though arguably doing little to control the proliferation of vagabonds, rogues and ruffians in general, it created a crucial distinction between the officially validated professional actor and the itinerant amateur, directly influencing the historical development of theatre and contributing to the creation of the professional London troupes for which Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson and others wrote. Within thirty years, the primary exemplars of the theatrical profession in England were not the motley troupes touring the inn-yards of the provinces, but collections of skilled professionals, "with enormous financial investments backing them and a position in London guaranteed by the King himself" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 39).

What the "Act," and the sea-changes in the acting profession which rapidly followed it, could not completely eliminate, however, was the ambiguity in the social position of professional actors. Nor did it prevent the wide variance in reactions that actors garnered from society, whether emanating from those who attended and cheered their plays or those who leveled trenchant criticisms at them (usually from the pulpit and/or via the pamphlet). A number of performers achieved upward mobility, public prominence, social respectability and the apparent friendship of members of the nobility. Richard Tarlton, the first great clown of the Renaissance, boasted Sir Philip Sidney as godfather to his son (105). Shakespeare famously made enough money (albeit more as a sharer in the Lord Chamberlain's Men and King's Men than as actor or playwright) to buy himself the status of a gentleman, by "purchasing for his father the rank of armiger" (23). During the transition from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean period, Edward Alleyn—born the son of an innkeeper but now the leading impresario of the Admiral's Men and probably the wealthiest London player—was requested to "make a speech as Genius standing on

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the Londonium arch for King James's triumphal parade through London in 1604" (110). When the first Spanish ambassador post-Armada arrived in London, the actors Augustine Phillips, John Heminges and "ten of their fellows" waited upon him for eighteen days, wearing the livery of the King's servants (Schoenbaum 252).

Yet these were, though not unique, certainly relatively rare occurrences and individuals. In contrast to such luminaries of the theater, most players of the time achieved little fame and social respectability. As Gurr notes:

> …there is no evidence that many common players ever rose beyond their immediate circumstances in the tiring-houses and taverns of London and the provinces. It is probably not an overstatement to say that to the aristocracy they were at best befriended parasites, and servants in more than just their official name. (*Shakespearean Stage* 105)

This ambiguity in the social status of the Renaissance player was only underlined by the nature of their craft, where they daily donned and doffed the appearance and manners of their social betters and inferiors, switching seamlessly between roles in a manner that both fascinated and deeply concerned many. In their performances as well as in their lives and social status, particularly in the estimation of their surrounding society, the Renaissance players continually stepped back and forth between many worlds—a fact within which lay both their appeal and their danger.

With players and audience alike aware of the former's ambiguous status, the subject found its way into the plays created for them, leading to one of the more persistent and distinctive tropes of Renaissance drama—the character as player/playmaker. This metatheatrical element, like most others, arose directly from the context within which early modern drama was created, namely the presence of playwrights as regular, sometimes permanent, members of the professional troupes. These playwrights, unsurprisingly, created characters who are metaphorically analogous to their creators and to the players they worked with (or were, since

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many playwrights were actors). Such figures appear in all genres and periods of Renaissance drama. Whether Marlowe's Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* (1589) or the eponymous protagonist and his parasite Mosca in Jonson's *Volpone* (1605), such characters transform their appearance, manipulate the movements and actions of those around them, and often address the audience while doing so. Even if the analogy to stage performance were too subtle for Renaissance spectators to notice (which, I would contend, could hardly be the case), a multitude of characters emphasize the comparison by actually creating theatrical performances on stage (not only the play-within-the play, but also dumb shows, interludes, or segments of scenes where they persuade other characters to perform certain parts). Besides obvious Shakespearean examples such as Richard III, Iago and, above all, Hamlet, a few representative instances are the protagonist of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1588), Vindice in Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606), Ferdinand and Bosola in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), and De Flores in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622).

That all of these characters appear in tragedies (mostly revenge tragedies) is not coincidental, since a common theme among such player/playmaker characters is that they are both ambiguous and doomed, the chameleon-like ability and creativity in controlling the stage space which makes them such fascinating characters also leading to their spiritual, moral and physical demise. It was the existence of prevailing social concerns about the mutability of playwrights and players that made metatheatrical depictions of characters resembling them so rich in potential meaning. Hence, such portrayals invariably reflected the existing apprehensions about the dangers of such ambiguity. Ironically, these portrayals themselves contributed in some degree to the social consciousness of the figure of the ambiguous and chameleon player, as well as to the popular concerns about the potentially deleterious effects of theatre as a whole.

The theater as corruption

      Developing in part from the notoriety and ambiguity with which the actors performing

within them were perpetually imbued, the idea of theaters (especially public, outdoor ones) as

locations of great danger and corruption never completely fell out of vogue during the

Renaissance and contributed heavily to their eventual closing in 1642. Much of the criticism also

developed, of course, from the habitual subjects of the popular drama—or at least the subjects as

those later to be known as the anti-theatricalists saw them. Stephen Gosson, purportedly a former

actor and a confessed writer of plays, is only one among many such authors, making somewhat

of a career of inveighing against the stage's immorality. His *Schoole of Abuse, containing a*

pleasant invective against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters and such like Caterpillars of the

Commonwealth (1579) likely influenced Sir Philip Sidney's subsequent *An Apology for Poetry*

(or, The Defense of Poesy), which attempted to repudiate some of Gosson's accusations. By the

time the *Apology* appeared, nearly a decade after Sidney's death in 1586, Gosson's treatise had

already drawn criticism and responses from many, including the amusingly ironic response by

some players, who revived some of Gosson's own plays for public consumption. In response to

such critiques, Gosson then provided the *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), where he argued

that:

> The argument of Tragedies is wrath, crueltie, incest, injurie, murther yther violent by
> sworde, or voluntary by poison. The persons, Gods, Godesses, juries, friends, kings,
> Quenes, and mightie men. The grounde worke of Commedies, is love, coenedge, flatterie,
> bawderie, slye conveighance of whoredone; The persons, cookes, knaves, baudes
> parasites, courtezanes, lecherous olde men, amorous young men…

Such accusations were hardly uncommon at the time, forcing defenders of the stage to argue that

the subject matter of the theatre edified the viewer rather than corrupted them.

Many were not so convinced, suspecting and claiming that hapless audiences were being led hopelessly astray by the stagecraft of the players into a cesspit of debauchery. Richard Schilders, in "The Printer to the Reader," which appeared in John Rainolds' *The Overthrowe of Stage Playes* (1600), inveighs against those who cannot or will not differentiate between the pleasures of the sermon and the stage:

> … the gentlewoman that sware by her trouth, *That she was as much edefied at a play as ever she was at any sermon, etc.* will, ere she die, be of another minde, though it may be shee saied true then, in regard of her owne negligence and backwardness in not giving eare to the word of God with reverence.

Rainolds' criticism focuses on the subtle power of dramaturgy to sway the minds of the audience to ignoble pursuits, a criticism that the metatheatrical material in plays (especially their prologues and epilogues) often attempted to deflect. Some other critics neither saw such subtlety, nor used any in their accusations. As far as John Northbrooke, author of the 1579 tract, *A Treatise against Idlenes, Idle Pastimes, and Playes [in, Spiritus est vicarius Christi in terra. A Treatise wherein Dicing, Daucing, Vaine plaies or Enterludes ... are reprooved ... Made Dialoguewise by Iohn Northbrooke ...]* was concerned, one of the primary attractions of the theater for its visitors was that it trained them in the same damaging artfulness that the actors used:

> If you will learne howe to bee false and deceive your husbandes, or husbandes their wyves howe to playe the harlots, to obtaine anie ones love, howe to ravishe, howe to beguyle, howe to betraye, to flatter, lye, sweare, forsweare, how to allure to whoredome, howe to murther, howe to poyson, howe to disobey and to rebell agaynst Princes … Shall not you learne, then, at such Enterludes howe to practice them?

For such critics, the theater's corruptive influence lay not only in its seduction of the simple and the easily distracted from more important matters, such as the labor which young apprentices could profitably be employed in or the concern about one's soul which all good English men and

women should focus on, but in the way it infused its negative qualities into the citizenry and the surrounding society.

One among these qualities was particularly commonly criticized by those who viewed the theaters —especially the public ones—with a jaundiced eye, namely that they were physical locations which attracted the criminal element of London and gave them easy access to victims. Arguably, of course, this would have been true of most places in the city where large groups of people gathered, as Robert Greene (who, as playwright and self-confessed rogue, might be presumed to know something about the subject) notes in his *The second and last part of Conny-catching* (1592). The Conny-catchers, he says, find their "gaines lies by all places of resort and assemblies therefore their chief walkes is Paules, Westminister, the exchange, Plaies, Bear-garden, running at Tilt, the L. Maiors day, any festival meetings, fraies, shootings, or great faires" (C2). What perhaps set the public playhouses apart from the other events and locations listed by Greene is that they provided the perfect combination of being open almost daily, in a fixed location, and featuring easy access to both higher and lower social classes. Furthermore, in a bid to escape the jurisdiction and usually inimical scrutiny of the City of London, many public theaters were built outside the city proper, in areas which contained structures seeking similar freedom from official control. This is why the Rose, the Swan and the Globe theaters were located in the Bankside district of Southwark, across the Thames from the city, in an area "already notorious for its 'pastymes' and pleasures, its brothels, bowling alleys, bearbaitings" (Rutter I). Here were drawn much of the criminal elements of the city, at least partly in fact and certainly in the disapproving imagination of the anti-theatricalists. This reality was often overstated and emphasized in the never-ending attempts to control the theaters, such as in the

Lord Mayor's complaint to Lord Burghley (1594), repeated in a 1597 request to the Privy

Council requesting the abolition of the playhouses:

> …the quality of such as frequent the sayed playes, being the ordinary places of meeting for all vagrant persons & maisterless men that hang about the Citie, theeves, horsestealers, whoremoongers, coozeners, connycatching persones, practizers of treason, and other such lyke… (qtd. in Gurr, *Playgoing* 252)

Though the petition—and many others like it—came to naught, its very existence and chosen

rhetoric points to the continuing idea of the public playhouses as dens of iniquity and depravity.

While such criticisms did not lead to the eradication of the playhouses desired by the city

leaders or apparently even to any real decrease in popularity, the Crown evidently had serious

concerns about the potentially inimical influence of the stage on the political views of the

populace. Such concerns led, in 1578, to the Privy Council granting censorship and licensing

rights over plays throughout the nation to the Master of the Revels, an "official in the Lord

Chamberlain's office, charged with providing suitable entertainment at court" (Dutton,

Mastering the Revels 1). From this point, the Master of the Revels had to personally license

every play manuscript before it could be staged, which would only occur after all material

viewed as explicitly (or, often, implicitly) politically subversive was excised from the text.

Questions remain about precisely what effect such oversight had on actual stage performances,

especially since such influence necessarily waned the further a company was from London (such

as when touring). Also, certain London performances remained beyond the purview of the

official censor, such as those of the boy companies at Paul's (re-established in 1599) and at

Blackfriars (begun in 1600), which used the pretense of only providing private performances.

Indirect evidence of the influence of the Master of the Revels' censorship lies in the fact that it

was the boy companies, particularly at Blackfriars, which produced plays (such as *Philotas*,

Eastward Ho! and *Isle of Gulls*, from 1604-1606) that were arguably "the most radical ever

staged in London between 1574 and 1642" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 71). Thus taking

advantage of their position beyond the reach of the Master of Revels' censoring pen, the boy

companies eventually overplayed their hand, leading to a resultant lack of favor and eventual

dissolution. This, combined with the flourishing of adult companies under their increasingly

court-centered patronage (such as when James I divided the patronage of the primary adult

companies among the Queen, his heir Prince Henry, and himself), further indicates the possible

dangers of unfettered dramatic performance in the eyes of the English crown. Similar evidence is

found in the list of influential Renaissance playwrights and players who spent time in jail or

fearing arrest for their authorship and performance—Thomas Nashe, Ben Jonson, George

Chapman, John Marston, and Thomas Middleton, among others.

In view of such existing and commonly propagated critiques of the dramatic profession,

and the attendant material risks that both playacting and playwriting entailed, it is utterly

unsurprising that the Renaissance provides a wealth of literature featuring varied defenses of the

theatre. A particularly popular argument relied on the idea that acting provided valuable skills

and education, a concept which both explained the existence of the boys' companies and, in turn,

was justified—in the words of many, if not always in their listeners' minds—by their presence.

The age of those being thus educated and edified was not always a factor in such defenses, nor

was the author's actual allegiance to the stage. John Brinsley, a "schoolmaster, wrote a book in

1612 called *Ludus Literarius*, praising the value of playing in the education of schoolchildren"

(Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 114). In the same year, Thomas Heywood, whose connection with

the theatre—as playwright and actor—was in inverse proportion to Brinsley's, provided one of

the more famous defenses of the educative value of the stage in his *An Apology for Actors:*

> Do not the Universities, the fountaines and well springs of all good arts, learning, and
> documents, admit the like in their colledges? and they (I assure my selfe) are not ignorant

of their true use. In the time of my residence in Cambridge, I have seen Tragedyes, Comedyes, Historyes, Pastorals, and Shewes, publickly acted, in which Graduates of good place and reputation have been specially parted. This is held necessary for the emboldening of their Junior schollers to arme them with audacity against they come to bee employed in any publicke exercise, as in the reading of the Dialecticke, Rhetoricke, Ethicke, Mathematicke, the Physicke or Metaphysike Lectures. It teacheth audacity to the bashfull Grammarian … and makes him a bold Sophister, to argue *pro et contra*, to compose his Sillogismes, Cathegoricke, or Hypotheticke … to reason and frame a sufficient argument to prove his questions, or to defend any *axioma*, to distinguish of any Dilemma, and be able to moderate in any Argumentation whatsoever. (C4)

What makes Heywood's argument, though seemingly narrowly dependent on the erudite and academic drama which emerged from the universities and the Inns of Court, particularly representative of other such defenses from his time is the rhetorical emphasis on the pragmatic utility of playing—and on its nature as performance, an emphasis that is intrinsic to early modern (and, arguably, all) metatheater.

Authors and speakers who rejected and criticized Renaissance theatre commonly based their critiques on an assumption of the stage as a source of corruptive falsehood (as in Northbrooke's aforementioned criticism). Hence, it was a logical strategic move for its defenders to de-emphasize such elements and explicitly eschew claims of representational truth. While the theater could, and would, sometimes strive to hold a mirror up to nature, the presence of the mirror was always obvious to all participants. It also provided another factor which playwrights and players could utilize to create added entertainment (as the more detailed coverage of specific plays in Chapters 3-5 of this study delineates), while emphasizing its presence to shield them from the criticisms of the anti-theatricalists. While the audiences flocking to the theaters hardly needed such defenses to justify their presence, they could hardly have been unaware of the ideological and moral conflict that they were stepping into. To attend a play, especially at one of the public theaters strategically situated in areas providing limited official control, was to step into a heavily contested space, a "heteroglot institution in which the exchange of experience

crosses every social boundary" (Bristol 122). Both defenders and critics of the theater constantly

reminded audiences of this fact, whether in the texts of the plays, the performances of the

players, or the books, pamphlets and sermons outside the theaters.

A theatre of lies

The aforementioned attacks on the nature of the early modern stage likely impelled

players and playwrights toward overt metatheatricality, which provided at least a rhetorical

defense of their enterprise. Ironically, this explicitly performative nature also opened early

modern theatre up to another criticism, namely that of open fakery and the depiction of

implausible actions. Such critiques—as with the anti-theatrical accusations of the corruptive

nature of drama—emerged just as readily from the pens of individuals actively engaged in

theatrical pursuits as from writers with no such connection to the theaters. George Whetstone, in

the prefatory epistle to this 1578 play *Promos and Cassandra*, describes the "impossibilities" of

contemporary drama disparagingly:

> The Englishman in this quallitie, is most vaine, indiscreet, and out of order: he first
> groundes his worke, on impossibilities, then in three howers ronnes he throwe the world:
> marryes, gets Children, makes Children men, men to conquer kingdoms, murder
> monsters, and bringeth Gods from Heaven, and fetcheth Divels from Hel. And (that
> which is worst) their ground is not so unperfect, as their working indiscreete: not waying,
> so the people laugh, though they laugh them (for theyr folleys) to scorne: Many tymes
> (To make mirthe) they make a Clowne companion to a Kinge: in theyr grave Counsels,
> they allow the advise of fooles.

Whetstone's comment, of course, is as much (and arguably more) a strategic rhetorical pose as

an honest appraisal of the drama of his time, allowing him to argue that his own play will not

commit the follies that others do. It also, if inadvertently, not only underlines precisely how little

concern there was regarding unrealistic elements in Renaissance performances but also how

prepared playwrights were to draw upon the audience's ability to respond to and accept such

elements. If an analogy may be made to Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief,' unlike in

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the poet's formulation, which emphasized the role of the creator in the process, here the implicit emphasis is on the active engagement participation of the viewer. It was this response which playwrights and players constantly responded to, drew on, supported and manipulated, especially in their deployment of metatheatrical material.

The most famous defense of poetic creation from the Renaissance, Sidney's *The Defense of Poesy*, expressing viewpoints that are simultaneously analogous and divergent to those of the aforementioned authors, matches them in similarly underlining the metatheatrical qualities of the stage. When praising the golden world of the creative artist, Sidney claims that whereas the historian, "being captived to the truth of a foolish world, is many times a terror from well-doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness," forced to show the "valiant Miltiades rot in his fetters" or the "just Phocion and the accomplished Socrates put to death like traitors," the tragic poet can present a world where "if evil men come to the stage, they ever go out—as the tragedy writer answered to one that misliked the show of such persons—so manacled as they little animate folks to follow them" (121). For Sidney, in contrast to Gosson, theatre potentially provides access to moral judgment and spiritual (as opposed to historical) truth and, in doing so, it provides an educative value which stretches far beyond that which Heywood delineates. Renaissance playwrights often emphasized similar ideas in their usage of metatheater, arguing that their dramas allowed them to performatively delineate the value of goodness and the dangers of evil.

Sidney's coverage of English drama, however, is closer to the critiques of Whetstone than such a laudatory view of poetic creation might indicate. One of the more influential English supporters of the concept of the Aristotelian unities, he criticizes *Gorboduc* for being "faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporal actions. For where the stage

should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day; there is both many days and many places inartificially imagined" (148). Sidney, however, views *Gorboduc* as comparatively better than "all the rest," plays in which he finds—to him—deplorable damage done to the unity of space:

> Where you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now ye shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of shipwreck in the same place, and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave. While in the mean time two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field? (148)

He complains similarly about English theatre's treatment of time, of which "they are much more liberal," and about the (to him) unfortunate tendency to intermingle multiple genres at once, so that "all their plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns," as a result of which "neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragicomedy obtained" (148-150).

The accuracy of Sidney's value-judgments regarding Renaissance drama is open to debate, but what matters rather to this study is what we may glean from his remarks about the nature of Elizabethan theatre (and, by extension, the Jacobean theatre to follow) and the surrounding milieu within which it was created and performed. Though Sidney accurately notes that Renaissance plots and stagecraft consistently ignored the three unities, the reason lay not in a lack of critical judgment or classical understanding on the part of the playwrights, as he wrongly surmised. Such an opinion ignores or dramatically underplays the material and cultural reality of the Elizabethan stage. Writing for this forum and supported primarily by the money its audiences

provided, a Renaissance playwright did not have the luxury of ignoring its realities. Instead, they responded to—and usually, as Sidney deplores, drew heavily upon—the audience's ability and willingness to accept the overt fictionality of the stage. In a world where preachers shouted from pulpits that all truly persuasive illusions were the work of Satan, where city fathers condemned their theaters as hives of villainy, and where the physical nature of the stage directly militated against dramatic realism, it is hardly surprising that Renaissance theatre eschewed persuasive dramatic illusion and, in fact, heavily emphasized its metatheatrical bent at every turn. In the Renaissance theaters, the art could not afford to conceal the art. The act of overtly treating the same unvariegated stage as Africa and Asia, as garden and rock, was—notwithstanding Sidney's critique—not an error but rather an important strategic decision, allowing playwrights and players to ply their craft with as much safety and creative license as possible.

The physical theaters

While the social, cultural, political and economic milieus within which Renaissance drama functioned all pushed it toward metatheater, by far the largest influence was the physical nature of the Renaissance theaters, which ultimately mediated the manifestation of such influences on stage.   It should be noted, while engaging in such analysis, that even when one focuses on the material reality of the Renaissance stage, it would be both inaccurate and impossible to uncouple its physicality from the nature of the surrounding world. While one cannot be utterly certain why the builders of the early public theaters of Elizabethan London chose to utilize the actual shapes, dimensions and components that they did, they were certainly influenced by the nature of earlier structures and locations connected with drama. Before the permanent theaters gave them fixed and perpetually (outbreaks of plague, the English weather, and the pleasure of the Master of Revels and the Crown permitting) available forums for

performance, theatrical companies commonly performed in the yards of inns, in arenas generally

dedicated to other entertainment (such as bear-baiting), and in other locations not primarily

designed for theatre. Unsurprisingly, when the companies later built their theaters, they

replicated qualities which were common to such locations, which, in turn, significantly mediated

the nature of the performances they would—or could—stage within.

The Red Lion, the one Elizabethan playhouse that is definitively known to have predated

James Burbage's The Theatre (built in 1576), provides the first case in point. In 1567, John

Brayne—Burbage's brother-in-law and, later, fellow financier of the Theatre—converted the

yard of a Whitechapel farmhouse. In the open space, he added:

> … a circuit of scaffolding that provided seating for three levels of spectators, with inside
> it a stage built against a turret standing thirty feet high from ground level … the extensive
> stage included a hole for a trapdoor. It was raised 5 feet (1.5 metres) above ground level
> and its area was specified as 40 feet by 30 (12.2 by 9.1 metres), a little bigger than the
> Fortune's stage was to be in 1600. (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 141)

Brayne's construction here was simply a more permanent version of what one might have

encountered in a marketplace or inn-yard, adding only a little to what would have been part of

the nature of playing and play-watching in such a location. Just as actors in the older forums

performed in the midst of a circle of spectators, they would do so here. In an inn-yard or market

square, the audience primarily stood in a circle around the stage, some spectators watching from

the overlooking balconies and windows. In Brayne's construction, some of the audience would

have sat in the galleries and others stood around the stage in the yard—less a dynamic change

than a simple borrowing from the "galleried animal-baiting rings which had stood on the south

bank of the Thames for the previous forty or more years," which had featured triple galleries

long before any theater did (Gurr, *Playgoing* 15). The more innovative additions, the trapdoor

and the attached turret (presumably for aerial effects and advertising of the production), changed

little about the overarching physical similarity to an inn-yard or a bear-baiting arena. The

significant relationship between the public theaters and such other public arenas is underlined by

the continuation of theatrical performances at London inns till 1599, when the Privy Council

finally banned the practice, and the fact that two later playhouses, "the Boar's Head and the Red

Bull, were converted from inns" (15). In view of the theaters' physical connection to the inn-

yards, market squares and bear-baiting arenas, the apparent similarities in their audiences (and

the audiences' behavior and expectations) was both inevitable and would contribute heavily to

the metatheatrical nature of the performances created for them.

The Red Lion appears to have had little success or fame, but the more famous and longer-

lasting theaters which followed swiftly in its wake were to replicate many of its physical

qualities, and thus looked back similarly to the earlier staging locations. Less than a decade later,

James Burbage constructed the Theatre. A year later, built in close proximity, came the Curtain.

> The Theatre and its neighbour the Curtain each had a large protruding stage, presumably
> not unlike the platforms set up in market-places for travelling players, which were
> normally backed by a narrow curtained booth for the players. Each had a tiring-house in
> the bays behind the stage. The Theatre's auditorium was a scaffolding of galleries like
> those provided for the Red Lion and the bear-baiting arena and innyards. (141)

The history of the physical elements of these theaters provides some key indicators to the

complex influence which their material nature exercised on their audiences and the performing

players. In virtually every Renaissance public theater, the stage—whatever its size or its

dimensions—jutted into the yard, requiring the audience to stand (or sit in the galleries) on at

least three sides of it. In fact, the existence of galleries behind the stage, as displayed in the

Johanes deWitt sketch (1596) of the Swan, makes it virtually certain that the performances

actually occurred before an audience that surrounded the stage on every side. This was true for

the private, indoor theaters too, as evidenced by Inigo Jones' design for one (probably the

Cockpit), which "provides not only two levels of boxes on each side of the stage but also what we consider to be seats 'behind', on the degrees flanking the stage balcony's central music room" (Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company* 47).

The influence of such a stage on the audience's perspective (physically and otherwise) and, concomitantly, on almost every aspect of staging cannot be overemphasized. It can, however, certainly be misunderstood or under-appreciated, particularly by later critics and theorists who bring very different suppositions about drama with them. The deWitt sketch itself provides telling evidence of how such a stage might be viewed in times when it is not common. A twentieth or twenty-first century viewer might see it as quite analogous to a proscenium stage, with performers in the front and entrances and exits visible in the rear. The sketch, being a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional space, provides only one possible way of viewing the physicality of the Renaissance stage. If the chosen perspective had been from one of the galleries to the left or right of the stage, the perception would be quite different, and if from the gallery for spectators above and to the rear of the stage, not just reversed in direction but heavily modified in height and elevation. Even to refer to the gallery as at the rear of the stage is anachronistic, since front-stage and backstage only had such stable meanings once the proscenium stage came to be the norm after the Restoration, more than half a century after deWitt's sketch was made. In early modern theaters, at least three edges of the stage were in close proximity to an audience, with the presence of balcony/gallery audiences adding an additional layer of complication to the issue of staging and direction.

A crucial result of such staging was the audience's constant and deep awareness of its own presence in the theater. This was not only true in public theaters with their universally equal lighting provided by the sunshine available, but in the candle-lit private theaters too, where

spectators could see themselves and their compatriots as clearly as (if not more than) they could view the players. Many of the aforementioned critiques of the theaters, whether as forums for vulgar display or centers of criminal activity, would have been near impossible in a silent and darkened auditorium. In Elizabethan and Jacobean London, however, the presence of the audience was impossible to ignore, not just for the spectators themselves but for those who performed for them. In view of the ancestry and near relatives of the public theaters—namely the marketplaces, inn-yards, and bear-baiting rings—it should be utterly unsurprising that their audiences felt little need to present the players with something which is utterly taken for granted by modern playgoers and performers: silence.

Renaissance spectators treated a visit to the theater with little solemnity. To claim, like Hamlet, that the groundlings could comprehend "nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise" (3.2.4) is probably to overstate the point, but they were, from all available evidence, quite happy to express both appreciation and criticism of the performance with substantial noise. Such behavior seems not to have been restricted only to those standing in the yard but was expressed by their social superiors as well. Stephen Gosson, in *The Trumpet of Warre* (1598), comments disparagingly that "in publike Theaters, when any notable shew passeth over the stage, the people arise in their seates, & stand upright with delight and eagernesse to view it well" (C7v; qtd. in Gurr, *Playgoing* 253). Playwrights and players alike had to be aware of such a propensity for loud responses and catered to it in various ways, as well as having to work around it in performance.

It should again be noted that there is good evidence that such responses were not restricted to the public theaters. The indoor playhouses, though catering to crowds which prided themselves on being less plebian, evidently provided similar responses—and problems—for the

players. John Lyly, in the prologue to his *Campaspe* (c. 1584), likely performed at Blackfriars, hopefully concludes that he wishes "that although there bee in your precise judgementes an universall mislike, yet wee maye enjoy by your wonted courtisies a general silence." The fact that such a hope even had to be expressed is instructive, though whether it was met with any success is questionable. Certainly, less than five years later, while presenting his *Midas* (c. 1589) via the Children of Paul's, Lyly's prologue was still claiming, in wheedling tones, "Onelie this doth encourage us, that presenting our studies before Gentlemen, thogh they receive an inward mislike, wee shall not be hist with an open disgrace." A decade later, John Marston inserts an amusingly metatheatrical comment into the mouth of characters in his *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (1600), presented at the same venue, "I saw the Children of *Powles* last night / And troth they pleased mee prettie, prettie well, / … Ifaith I like the Audience that frequenteth there / With much applause" (5.99-102). As at the public theaters, the audiences at the private playhouses had no lack of loud applause (or, apparently, sometimes hissing) for the players.

Overt expressions of approbation and disapproval were hardly the only distractions that the Renaissance players had to work with and around. While the performance was under way, vendors selling "water or beer, fruit, and nuts, walked through the yard and through such of the galleries as allowed them enough space" (Gurr and Ichikawa 5). Such peddlers were a regular part of the theater-going experience, since selling "food and drink during the performance was one of the many menial jobs open to aspirant players who could not get taken on as hired men to play the non-speaking parts" (5). The profit motive seemingly justified the additional distractions which the addition of food and drink added to the theatrical experience in Renaissance theaters, though there is evidence that players were "unhappy about the noise of nuts being cracked during their performances. In fact nut-cracking was the only regular complaint apart from the prologue's

customary plea for silence" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 278). The most popular of drinks,

bottled ale, "which was sold during the performance, was also occasionally remarked on for the

potentially misunderstood hiss it gave when opened" (278). Like the peddlers, the audiences

were free to move back and forth, especially in the public theaters, with the physical nature of

the forum expressly encouraging them to do so. Those in the yard had to deal with the jostling of

other spectators, the distraction of the peddlers, the fear of pickpockets, the vicissitudes of the

English weather, and—perhaps most important—the simple difficulty of staying on one's feet

for a performance lasting a couple of hours. Their luckier compatriots in the galleries did not

face all of the same issues (rain, for example, would not be as much of a problem), but they

would evidently shift positions if needed, whether to find more comfortable seats or simply to

avoid sitting behind some gallant with a large hat.

Such elements contributed heavily to the reputation of the theaters as loudly disruptive

spaces. Edmund Spenser, in *The Faerie Queene* (1596), compares the tumult at a noble tourney

to what might have been heard in the playhouses:

> All suddenly they heard 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. (IV.iii.37-40)

Many shared Spenser's opinion. In the same year, when James Burbage attempted to begin

performances at the indoor theater he had partly purchased and partly constructed at the

Blackfriars, the district's inhabitants sent an opposing petition to the Privy Council, mentioning

the "generall inconvenience to all the inhabitants of the same precinct, both by reason of the

great resort and gathering together of all manner of vagrant and lewde persons" and emphasizing

that "the same playhouse is so neere the Church that the noyse of the drummes and trumpetts

will greatly disturbe and hinder both the ministers and parishioners in tyme of devine service and

sermons" (qtd. in Gurr, *Playgoing* 29). In an intriguing turn of events, George Carey, Lord

Hunsdon, the new patron of Burbage's company (his father having died the same year, while the

theater was under construction), was mentioned in the petition as living near the new playhouse

and signed it, which presumably contributed substantially to its successful quashing of Burbage's

plan.

For those regularly visiting the theater, however, such criticisms clearly mattered little.

Besides being forums where the audiences could express themselves verbally, the theaters

catered to their desire for visual self-aggrandizement as well, as evidenced by the volume of

contemporary references to theaters as places not only designed for seeing but to be seen. In

1580, following Gosson's criticisms of the theatre, an anonymous author presented a book

focused on—and viciously attacking—stage plays, titled *A second and third blast of retrait from*

plaies and Theaters. Echoing Gosson (whose works provide the first blast), the text refers to the

theater as the "chapel of Satan," where anyone visiting it "shal finde there no want of yong

ruffians, nor lacke of harlots, utterlie past al shame: who presse to the fore-front of the scaffolds,

to the end to showe their impudencie, and to be as an object to al mens eies." Interestingly, the

anonymous author is fairly reliably considered to be Antony Munday, author and co-author of

multiple plays in the following decades. This again underlines the uniquely contested nature of

the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages, where the same individual who wrote for it could

apparently—if not always openly—feel impelled to accuse it of being a forum for irreligious and

licentious display.

Multiple contemporary texts, even when not sharing Munday's condemnation of the

theater, underline precisely how important the potential for public display was for many

theatergoers, particularly those who could afford to pay for better seating. Not so coincidentally,

the price of seating in Renaissance theaters was directly related to the visibility it afforded the occupant—as both subject and object. The Swiss traveler Thomas Platter, whose detailed descriptions of the London playhouses provide some of the best contemporary evidence for their nature, described them as follows:

> The playhouses are so constructed that they play on a raised platform, so that everyone has a good view. There are different galleries and places, however, where the seating is better and more comfortable and therefore more expensive. For whoever cares to stand below only pays one English penny, but if he wishes to sit he enters by another door and pays another penny, while if he desires to sit in the most comfortable seats, which are cushioned, where he not only sees everything well, but can also be seen, then he pays yet another English penny at another door. (174-175)

If such an idea of audience positioning might not seem unduly strange to modern audiences, the same can hardly be said of its more unique manifestations. The gallery behind the stage, as seen in the Johanes deWitt sketch of the Swan theater, is a case in point. There would sit the richest members of the audience—the gallants, the nobles and visiting dignitaries. The cost of such positioning is explained in part by the fact that it provided the closest view and hearing of the performance. Such benefits evidently negated the balcony seating's liabilities, such as the fact that any involvement with the discovery space below was hidden to those above, such as Hamlet's stabbing of Polonius behind the arras or the revelation of Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess in *The Tempest*. However, what was undeniable and unique to the gallery was that its occupants were visible to every other spectator in the theater, who could hardly look at the stage without also looking at those above it. As John Marston's cousin Everard Guilpin wrote of the Renaissance theatergoer looking up at the gallery, "See you him yonder, who sits o're the stage, / With the Tobacco-pipe now at his mouth" (1-2). The sight simultaneously reminded the audience that they were at a play and of the social gradations of the world in which the theaters

operated, necessarily requiring and inspiring the players to respond to such material realities in playwriting and performance.

The presence of the balcony-sitters is not the only, and arguably not the greatest, divergence between Renaissance and most 21st century theaters with regard to audience placement. Whereas the most visible members of the audience at the outdoor theaters appear to have been the aristocrats and gallants seated above the stage, at least some indoor theaters went a step further, or—more precisely—lower, by actually allowing multiple spectators to sit on the stage itself and watch the play. Such positioning far surpassed the balcony in terms of allowing the spectator ideal access to the action and perfect visibility to every other spectator's eyes. For those invested in such conspicuity, such as "a young gallant anxious to parade his newest clothes, the chance to sit in full view alongside the players must have been irresistible. It took an order from the king in person to ban sitting on the stage at the smallest of the hall playhouses in 1639" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 19). Evidently, this was a common—and irritating—enough phenomenon to require a royal decree. Certainly, other spectators could not have been particularly enthused at having to watch plays with this added factor. Sir John Davies, in his epigram 'In Rufum,' mocks "*Rufus,* the Courtier," who "at the Theater, / Leaving the best and most conspicuous place, Doth … to the stage himselfe transferre." Thomas Dekker, in *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609), mocks both the "scarecrows in the yard" and the fops on stage, gleefully warning the latter that sitting on stage means the groundlings may "hoot at you, hiss at you, spit at you, yea, throw dirt even in your teeth … [and] with a full throat, cry, 'Away with the fool!'" (62).

It is unlikely that players and playwrights looked happily at the prospect either, though the exigencies of finances and social rank forced them to cater to such courtiers, who were

allowed to actually pass through the tiring-house and purchase stools at a minimum cost of two shillings. Francis Beaumont, in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, mocked this behavior via the Merchant George and his wife Nell (as covered in my last chapter). The first Shakespeare Folio's (1623) preface complained of wits sitting 'on the Stage at Black-friers, or the Cock-pit, to arraigne Playes dailie.' It is unlikely that anyone, whether in the audience or on stage, enjoyed the impromptu excitement of the Irish Lord Thurles, soon to be Earl of Ormond, attacking Captain Essex at a Blackfriars performance in 1632, when the latter objected to Thurles' position on stage in front of the box where Essex was standing (Gurr, *Playgoing* 33-36). The fact that Thurles, while on stage, could attempt a sword-blow at Essex underlines exactly how closely stage and audience were positioned in the Renaissance theaters and how constant a factor such proximity was in the early modern theater.

Speaking to the audience

With the audience's physical presence thus impossible to ignore, for both the spectators who comprised it and the players who performed before them, it is unsurprising—and inevitable—that playwrights incorporated, accounted for, and directly responded to audience presence in their plays, adding to the ubiquity of the metatheatrical mode in Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. Such explicit engagement in plays with the audience is particularly well-evidenced by the nature of the openings and closings, especially in prologues and epilogues. While not all Renaissance plays feature such elements, between 1558 and 1642, some "forty-eight per cent of the plays of this period had prologues and epilogues" (Wiley xxix). These dramatic frames to the performance straddled the porous boundary between the world of the play and that of the audience, with implicit (and often, explicit) emphasis on the *theatrum mundi*

beyond. Beginning first with the prologue, one may delineate its multi-faceted nature and effects

as Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann do:

> In such a space the imaginary world in the play tends to be introduced and addressed by
> (but also drawn into complicity with) the material occasion for playing, writing, and
> watching in the world of sixteenth-century London. During this period prologues as
> theatrical beginnings assert intentions and decisions; they indicate relations of privilege,
> governance and legitimacy; and they sort out potential continuities and discontinuities
> among diverging claims and expectations on the part of authors, performers, and
> spectators. Prologues authorize the theatre to produce and perform plays as well as the
> right of the audience to evaluate these practices. (ix)

My only quibble with their succinctly insightful appraisal would lie in the fact that the

Renaissance prologue usually not only authorizes the audience's "right" to evaluate their

practices, but particularly emphasizes the necessity and need for spectators to exercise their own

judgment. Considering the complex, fluid, and highly contested space that the Renaissance

theaters provided, it was a particularly strategic choice by players and playwrights to appeal to

the critical faculties of their audiences, allowing theatrical companies to guide them (subtly or

not) towards the desired responses, while providing (at least rhetorically, if not otherwise)

excuses for any failures or dangerous missteps on the performers' parts.

Even the simplest prologues, by definition, display an explicit awareness of and response

to the audience, with the primary variations lying in the complexity with which the nature of

audience response is presented, requested and manipulated. *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (c.1553),

one of the earliest Renaissance comedies, features a prologue that, from opening line ("As

Gammer Gurton with many a wide stitch") to closing ("With a pot of good nale they stroke up

their plaudity"), merely outlines the plot in detail, with none of the subtle obfuscations or

omissions that later, more sophisticated prologues will present. Yet even this simplistic narrative

indicates precisely how acceptable it was for performers on the early modern stage to remind

those around them of their shared enterprise. It also underlines how the entertainment provided

in these theaters could rely (even in a simplistic farce) not on unexpected surprises or unseen plot

twists, but on self-conscious awareness and engagement on the audience's part. The play's

concluding words are delivered by the bedlam character Diccon, turning seamlessly in the midst

of a speech from addressing other characters to the audience:

> But now, my good masters, since we must be gone
> And leave you behind us here, all alone—
> Since at our last ending thus merry we be,
> For Gammer Gurton's needle sake let us have a plaudity! (5.2.332-335)

Here, Diccon neatly bookends the play with the same word that the prologue ended with. He also

provides an early version of the common request from Renaissance prologues and epilogues for

audience "plaudity" (applause). While such references might be seen as perfunctory wheedling

on a performer's part, it is worth noting the emphasis here too on audience agency and judgment.

Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* (c.1569) features a similar prologue in that it lays out much

of the play's plot, though perhaps not as much as the entire printed title:

> *A Lamentable Tragedy, Mixed Full of Pleasant Mirth, Containing the Life of Cambyses, King of Persia,* from the beginning of his kingdom unto his death, his one good deed of execution, after that many wicked deeds and tyrannous murders committed by and through him, and last of all his odious death by God's justice appointed, done in such order as followeth.

The prologue sententiously references the Greek tragic poet "Agathon, he whose counsel wise to

princes' weal extended," "Tully the wise" (Cicero), and "sage and witty Seneca." The display of

Preston's learning also flatters the audience, treating them as educated enough to recognize the

references and sagacious enough to comprehend how the moral precepts of such philosophers is

displayed in the life and fate of Cambyses. Implicitly, the play also displays the early modern

playwright's awareness of his audience's ability to view and imaginatively connect seemingly

discordant elements. As the title suggests, the intermixing of genres and modes that Sidney

deplored occurs here in a substantial degree, with historical characters—Cambyses or his brother

Smerdis—frequenting the same stage as allegorical ones which might have sprung from a medieval Morality play, such as Shame, Commons' Cry and Murder. Among them walks the Vice, Ambidexter, interacting with characters in these discordant worlds and pausing to directly address the audience on multiple occasions—as many later and greater Renaissance villains will—until he flees the scene and ends the play, leaving it to the epilogue.

The epilogue, even more than the prologue, emphasizes the judgment and hopefully positive response of the audience, not only providing the conventional apology for any offense but seemingly requesting audience feedback and promising that the author will edit the play accordingly:

> Right gentle audience, here have you perused
> The tragical history of this wicked King.
> According to our duty, we have not refused,
> But to our best intent expressed everything.
> We trust none is offended by this our doing.
> Our author craves likewise, if he have squared amiss,
> By gentle admonition to know where the fault is.
> His good will shall not be neglected to amend the same.
> Praying all to bear, therefore, with this simple deed
> Until this time serve a better he may frame; (1-10)

Here, Preston actually offers to "amend" the play to suit the tastes of the audience. This is, of course, a purely rhetorical stance, aimed to diminish criticism for the performers, and hardly a complex one, as the extended and far more sophisticated pretense of actually carrying out such a promise in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* will later demonstrate. It does, nevertheless, illuminate the complex and symbiotic player-audience relationship which existed in Renaissance playhouses.

Similar, if slightly more complex, illumination is provided in the prefatory material to Sidney's favored play, Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561). The tragedy, as in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and *Cambyses*, begins with the narrative of the Argument. The play's

impending content is detailed, from the moment that "Gorboduc, King of Britain, divided his realm in his lifetime to his son, Ferrex and Porrex," to the ending that leaves the "land for a long time almost desolate and miserably wasted." Even more noteworthy is what intervenes between the Argument and the first Act proper, namely a dumb show, in which "six wild men" attempt to break a "fagot of small sticks … but it could not be broken by them" until they discover that the sticks can be broken piecemeal and proceed to do so. The spectacle metaphorically depicts the results that shall follow from Gorboduc's division of his kingdom. Functionally, the dumb show changes nothing about the following performance, but its existence metatheatrically emphasizes the artificiality and performative nature of the play that follows, and asks the audience to utilize their critical judgment to decipher the initial metaphor, just as they will have to in the following play. The act of judgment is not particularly difficult, since what is being expressed is "a recurrent pageant theme—the dangers of a divided kingdom," but what matters is the fact that it is implicitly referenced and called for (Venezky 114). Similar dumb shows appear before each Act of *Gorboduc*. Sometimes they are metaphoric, as in the mourners who appear "betokening death and sorrow to ensue upon the ill-advised misgovernment and dissension of brethren" (Dumbshow 3), and sometimes synechdocal, like the "company of harquebussiers and of armed men" (Dumbshow 5) that both represent and could be part of the armies currently ravaging the land in the play. Even the authors of a play as pedantic and didactic as *Gorboduc* (culminating in a sententious hundred-line speech from Eubulus, which is so evidently a direct address to the audience that no epilogue is needed) evidently feel the need to provide explicit references to, and evidence of, the nature of audience presence and the need for their active judgment.

Subsequent Renaissance playwrights sported with the nature of the prologue, bending and twisting it to their own ends and, in so doing, engaging audience attention and faculties anew.

Sometimes, the prologue proper essentially disappeared, transformed into what has latterly often been called an induction, a scene (or more) which further blurs the boundaries between the world of the play and that of the audience. In Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (c. 1593), the drunken tinker Christopher Sly is fooled by the unnamed Lord and his attendants into thinking that the memories of his life are only a dream, masking the reality that he is a noble. Though hardly the most sophisticated or convoluted induction in early modern drama, this one is representative in its deployment of multiple layers of metatheatrical fiction/reality. The actor playing Christopher Sly performs the role of a tinker, a character who is then impelled to perform the role of a noble (without any awareness of himself as playing a part), who then proceeds to watch the actual performance of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which is performed by other members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, some of whom have already appeared in the Induction playing hired actors. This complex layering of performance and viewership is further complicated by the fact that Sly, while viewing the performance of *The Taming of the Shrew*, is in turn viewed by the Lord who concocted this entire scheme. The Lord simultaneously watches Sly's unknowing performance and the play, while both characters are watched in turn by the theater audience.

The seemingly simple question of how and where Sly and the Lord are positioned adds a further layer of metatheatricality, raising the possibility that they were placed among or juxtaposed with the nobles and gallants who had come to watch the performance (whether on the edge of the stage in the Blackfriars or on the gallery above at the Globe). Such placement would raise significant questions about the meaning of positioning and power, whether physically, metaphorically or politically. Unfortunately, such issues remain mostly conjectural, since there is no surviving text of the play which reveals precisely what happens with Christopher Sly, whose

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presence is essentially ignored from the point that the induction ends. A more protracted and sophisticated use of such a framing device occurs in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (which I shall analyze in greater detail in the next chapter), where the pairing of Revenge and the Ghost of Andrea remain spectators throughout the play, commenting on the action at the end of every act. In both cases, the metatheatrical effect of these characters is heavily mediated by the physical nature of the stage.

A similar approach to Kyd is taken by Ben Jonson in *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599), where he "frames each act of the play with discussions between two critics (one of discerning judgement, the other a prey to fancy and convention) … [s]eated onstage with the wealthier members of the audience" (Cave 35). Asper, the play's presenter, invites the two critics, Cordatus and Mitis, to "Observe what I present, and liberally / Speak your opinions upon every scene, / As it shall pass the view of these spectators," and they gladly do so, speaking before, after and often during the performance of the other actors in the play. Jonson's aim here, as usual, is both satiric and didactic. He utilizes the critics to display the difference between acute discernment, personified in Cordatus (described in the play as "the author's friend; a man inly acquainted with the scope and drift of his plot; of a discreet and understanding judgment; and has the place of a moderator"), and those who blindly seek only entertainment and frivolity, as displayed in Mitis (who "is a person of no action, and therefore we afford him no character").

In expressing and carrying out his project, Jonson adopts a relentlessly metatheatrical mode, continuously underlining the performative and artificial nature of the stage even as he calls on the audience to judge its contents accurately. If these elements were not amply clear to the audience, at the play's end the critics leave the stage, with Cordatus' passing words to the primary character Macilente re-emphasizing the audience's role and presence: "Besides, here are

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those round about you of more ability in censure than we, whose judgments can give it a more satisfying allowance; we'll refer you to them" (5.7). After their departure Macilente (played by the same actor as Asper) begins his epilogue to the audience by jokingly commenting on the doubling of roles (which would have been obvious to the audience): "Well, gentlemen, I should have gone in, and return'd to you as I was Asper at the first; but by reason the shift would have been somewhat long, and we are loth to draw your patience farther, we'll entreat you to imagine it." Such overtly metatheatrical banter is neither rare nor surprising in Renaissance drama, only being noteworthy here because it comes at the end of a particularly explicit expression and treatment of the mode.

Jonson's extension of the prologue frame into a permanent stage presence in *Every Man out of his Humour* is, however, not the most complex use of the prologue. Though Cordatus and Mitis remain on stage throughout the play as commentators, their presence seemingly does not impinge on the performance occurring before them (and before the theater audience). There are large silences in their dialogue so that, as Richard Cave notes, "a spectator's sense of the visual dimension of the play in performance need not include the two critics for long stretches of time. The idea of reading the performance is not therefore taken back into the world of the play as it is with Quarlous and Overdo and shown to have social and moral consequences" (35). Cave's reference to Quarlous and Overdo, from Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), is accurate in that they do more explicitly display the importance of critical thought regarding performance, with their attitudes and perspectives actually affecting events in the world of the play. Quarlous and Overdo do not, however, function as prologue or epilogue, existing only within the play-world, with no explicit awareness of or engagement with the watching audience (which is left to the conventionally metatheatrical induction and epilogue). A blending of the positions found in these

two Jonson plays may be found in the play which represents the high point of metatheatrical engagement in the Renaissance, Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607). Here, the prologue beginning the play is almost immediately interrupted by the citizen and his wife, who both seat themselves on the stage to comment on, edit, direct and generally mishandle the contents of the ensuing play. Stretching the possibilities of the prologue (as I shall delineate in greater detail in chapter 5) to its furthest, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* displays precisely how far metatheatricality could extend in the theatre of the time.

The prologue is hardly the only theatrical convention which displays the early modern players' explicit awareness of and metatheatrical responses to the presence of their audiences, being only part of the tradition of direct address from players to spectators. Such addresses occurred in multiple forms, sometimes as asides, sometimes via the soliloquy, and—most subtly—sometimes in dialogue seemingly aimed at other characters, but conveying additional meaning to spectators that the listeners (and sometimes the speaker) on stage could not be aware of. Such forms emerged not only from the nature of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, but from their predecessors, the inn-yards and marketplaces, as well as from the morality plays, interludes, and other early modern dramas. Like the "explanatory prologues, the self-revelatory soliloquy or aside to the audience was a relic of the less sophisticated days that developed into a useful and more naturalistic convention of thinking aloud, but it never entirely ceased to be a theatre convention" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 122). The conventionality of such forms is underlined by the fact that while critics of the stage, from Sidney to Gosson, commented regularly on its unrealistic nature, the conventions of the aside and the soliloquy were invariably never the subject of such criticism. The same is true for the aforementioned addresses to the audience disguised (or, more often, not so disguised, particularly to the habitual London theatergoer)

within character dialogue. To the early modern critic (or playgoer), an actor openly breaking away from addressing others on stage to speak to the spectators was simply one more example of the way in which those on stage expressed an awareness of those watching and listening. In a theater setting where almost every element (intentionally or not) reminded both audiences and players of the artificiality and theatricality of the performance, there was little that could be called too unrealistic. It was not audience disbelief that was being sought or catered to, but rather an active awareness and response to the theatrical performance—or, more precisely, to the (meta)theatricality of the performance.

Doubling of roles

Another convention which flew directly in the face of a suspension of disbelief but was inevitable in early modern theatre, arising from the physical, social and economic exigencies within which the drama functioned, was that of the doubling of roles. In contrast to the itinerant groups of actors, the professional troupes based in London were substantially larger. Whereas a travelling group likely contained no more than half a dozen players, from "about 1580 the London-based companies consisted of a core of between eight and twelve co-owning players, 'sharers', who divided between them profits and costs such as properties and apparel, rent, and the wages of the hired extras" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 86). Even with these increased numbers of available actors, the size of the dramatis personae in the majority of early modern plays necessitated significant doubling of roles. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, for example, contains a total of twenty-three speaking parts, as well as several unnamed citizens, attendants, and soldiers. Thomas Platter, visiting London in 1599, wrote that on "September 21st after lunch, about two o'clock, I and my party crossed the water, and there in the house with the thatched roof [the Globe] witnessed an excellent performance of the tragedy of the first Emperor Julius

Caesar with a cast of some fifteen people" (166). Many plays featured far more parts, such as Shakespeare's *Henry V*, performed by his company shortly before *Julius Caesar* and featuring forty-two parts, presumably also played by some fifteen actors.

With the physical nature of the Renaissance stage, combined with the positioning and proximity of the audience, aided by the popularity of the London companies and the fame of their primary performers, it is certain that theatergoers would easily recognize the same actor playing multiple roles. Hence, players and playwrights adapted texts and performances to this eventuality, often explicitly addressing the fact that the doubling would be recognized and sometimes specifically calling for it. By doing so, their practices converted a seeming weakness of their material conditions of playing into rich fodder for metatheatrical games which helped to create symbolic meaning or simply amuse the audience (and usually both). These strategies are often explicitly called out in texts produced for the London companies. In George Chapman's first comedy, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596), originally performed by the Admiral's Men, "Edward Alleyn himself took on not only the main part but appeared in three disguises, each of them parodying one or another of his famous Marlowe roles. When actors and audience were so familiar to each other metatheatrical games became wonderfully exploitable" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 57).

Even in plays where we have no clear evidence of how roles were doubled, the certainty of the existence of doubling creates intriguing possibilities. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, certainly involved doubling. Theseus, Hippolyta, the two pairs of Athenian lovers, Philostrate, and the six rude mechanicals, must all have been played by different actors, since they are on stage together in Act 5 Scene 1. That leaves open, however, the strong possibility (since thirteen actors have already been accounted for) that the roles of Oberon and Titania were

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played by two among the aforementioned group, with Theseus and Hippolyta being the prime

possibilities. Such doubling would not only be effective on a purely mechanical level (since the

king and queen of the fairies are never on stage with Theseus and Hippolyta), but also provides a

symbolic commentary on the two relationships. Theseus proclaims a violent and controlling love,

saying, "Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword, / And won thy love, doing thee injuries"

(1.1.19-20). While the Amazon queen does not explicitly express any negative responses (due in

part to the lack of any following lines for the rest of the scene) to this sentiment, doubling

Theseus and Hippolyta with the feuding Oberon and Titania symbolically begs the question. The

additional metatheatrical in-joke that Oberon and Titania begin their meeting by accusing each

other of past infidelities with Theseus and Hippolyta is a bonus. In a play so heavily focused on

the relationship between imagination and reality, which explicitly explores the nature of

theatrical performance, it is difficult to imagine that the players would not take advantage of such

potentiality—especially since the nature of their stage forced them to engage with it.

Hamlet provides similar implicit possibilities as well as explicit evidence for the manner

in which the Lord Chamberlain's Men responded to and counted upon their audience's ability to

recognize the same actor in diverse roles. A particularly rich possibility is that of a doubled role

among the royal trio of Claudius, Fortinbras and the Ghost. Until the concluding scene, no two of

these characters occupy the stage simultaneously. While the presence of Fortinbras standing over

the slain Claudius necessitates these two positions being filled by different actors, it leaves open

the possibility that either of them could also play the Ghost. Such a doubling would allow a

single actor to bring together the imagined "Hyperion" of Hamlet's dead father and the "satyr"

that is his incestuous uncle or, alternatively, link the murdered ruler of Denmark and the

Norwegian prince (whose father, of the same name, Hamlet senior slew) who is to eventually

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claim the Danish throne. The rich volume of symbolic meanings and metaphorical commentaries

on the play's action and themes that such a doubling would create might require a chapter as

long as this one to fully elucidate, and it seems unlikely that Shakespeare's theatrical company

(which certainly doubled roles in the performance of *Hamlet*) would fail to take advantage of it.

The possibility seems especially likely in a play which is so relentlessly metatheatrical,

featuring not only the most famous example of a play-within-a-play on the Renaissance stage but

also perhaps the best-known instance of two characters referencing their performances within not

the same but another play:

> POLONIUS: I did enact Julius Caesar; I was killed i' the Capitol;
> Brutus killed me.
> HAMLET: It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. (3.2.98-100)

The lines refer to a performance of *Julius Caesar* where the player of Hamlet (presumably

Richard Burbage) performed the role of Brutus, assassinating Caesar, played by the actor of

Polonius. As with most such metatheatrical exchanges, the lines function on multiple levels. At

the simplest, they provide an in-joke for the players to share with members of their audience,

who would have been well aware of Burbage's roles. Within the plot of *Hamlet*, they provide a

darkly ironic foreshadowing of the murder of Polonius, which will occur only two scenes later.

Within the thematic fabric that connects the play, the lines remind the audience of the complex

interrelations between appearance, reality, performance and the *theatrum mundi*. All of these

layers of meaning arise from the exigencies of the Renaissance stage and the metatheatrical

modes utilized by players and playwrights in response. While it is hardly likely that every

members of Shakespeare's audience (or even most of them) were actually aware of all of these

layers, it is safe to say that a willing suspension of disbelief would actually be counterproductive

here, with active engagement being expected and called for in such lines.

The last dance

The aforementioned elements of Renaissance theatre are only a few representative

aspects of the drama of the time which contributed to and influenced the ubiquity of metatheater.

Virtually every component of the theatrical world of the time contributed in some way to the

metatheatrical modes which Elizabethan and Jacobean drama utilized and displayed. While it is

impossible for a study of this size to explore even a majority of these elements, let alone all of

them, one last subject should suffice to indicate the distinctive nature of Renaissance drama in

this regard—the closing jig. A common convention in public theaters from the beginnings of

Renaissance drama in London was the ending of the performance in a jig, enacting a "short and

usually bawdy story, the characters singing their rhyming dialogue to ballad metres as they

danced" (Gurr and Ichikawa162). While the popularity of the jig fluctuated over time, it was

certainly still in effect at the turn of the century. Thomas Platter, describing his aforementioned

visit to the Globe to watch *Julius Caesar*, remarks that "when the play was over, they danced

very marvelously and gracefully together as is their wont, two dressed as men and two as

women," and also refers to a comedy he viewed "in which they presented diverse nations and an

Englishman struggling together for a maiden; … in conclusion they danced very charmingly in

English and Irish fashion" (166). An unintended corroboration of the jig's popularity (and, to

some, deleterious effects) may be found in the Middlesex County Order of 1612, which

complained about the "certayne lewde Jigges songes and daunces used and accustomed at the

playhouse called the Fortune" (and at the Curtain and Red Bull, which were also under the

County's jurisdiction, being north of the city) on the grounds that they attracted "divers cut-

purses and other lewde and ill disposed persons" and were "causing tumults and outrages" (qtd.

in Chambers, IV, 340-341).

The existence of the jig, especially at the end of tragedies, speaks to the Renaissance audience's ability to adapt to, and seemingly enjoy, rapid mood switches. Such ability both grew from and contributed to the existence of theaters constantly utilizing metatheatrical modes, however much the tonal shifts may have been deplored by critics such as Philip Sidney (who had, in an amusing irony, the aforementioned connection to Richard Tarlton, the first great 'jigger' in Renaissance drama). The jig's role in early modern drama also denotes how porous the boundaries were between our 21st century conceptions of the play proper and the often underestimated elements—prologues, epilogues, music, jigs—which opened and closed them for the early modern playgoer. To the early modern playgoer, the interrelation between such elements and the rest of the play was obvious, since all of it was part of an overtly theatrical whole. For people like Thomas Platter, visiting a London theater in the Elizabethan or Jacobean period, there was always explicit awareness that they were at a performance and of the imaginative, emotional and mental engagement required to be there and partake fully in the process. For them, a play like *Julius Caesar* culminated not in the soaring iambic pentameter of Octavius and Antony's tribute to the "noblest Roman of them all" (5.5.68) but only after the more plebian entertainment of a song-and-dance.

Hamlet, as always, potentially provides an instructive example of the possibilities and effects of the jig. Immediately after the First Player's speech about the 'rugged Pyrrhus,' Hamlet criticizes Polonius' theatrical tastes, saying that "He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps" (2.2.495). The comment is in keeping with Hamlet's elitist repudiation of the simple tricks and conventions that please the groundlings and would not be particularly noteworthy, except for the play's closing. At the end, in all available early modern editions of the play, while Hamlet's corpse is borne off, three other bodies—Laertes, Gertrude and Claudius—remain on stage. It is

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tempting to ask, as Andrew Gurr does, whether the staging problem caused by the trio of corpses is intended, and that they "might not have sprung back to life to dance a final jig" (*The Shakespeare Company* 75). As might have occurred with a doubling of roles between the Ghost and either Fortinbras or Claudius, the themes and ideas expressed earlier in the play set up a conclusion that provides an ironic closure to the tragedy. If the characters whose corpses litter the stage comprise or partake in the concluding jig, it explicitly breaks down the porous distinction between dark tragedy and comical jig, so that "we see the jig being swallowed up and dissolved within the play" (Wiles 60). Such a combination of simple entertainment and complex layering of theatrical (and metatheatrical) meaning is one that the Renaissance audience was particularly well-placed (physically and otherwise) to appreciate and their stage to provide.

The spectators' thoughts

Surviving materials from the Renaissance provide substantial evidence of the existence and nature of metatheatrical material on the early modern stage, as has been indicated throughout this chapter. What is lacking, however, are explicit statements from theatergoers about their responses to such material. Certain evidence may be found in the statements of playwrights, players, literary theorists and anti-theatricalists alike, from which one may extrapolate information about audience response. Yet there is a remarkable and unfortunate paucity of material from common audience-members stating what they saw and, especially, what they thought while experiencing early modern theatre. The existing records indicate a much larger number of individuals whom we can confirm attended plays than the number from whom we have statements about their attendance. Of those few who did write explicitly about their play-going experiences, most (like the aforementioned Thomas Platter) have more to say about factual

details and plot elements that they witnessed than genuine critical commentary on the spectacles they witnessed and the language that they heard.

With the above caveats, I would contend, however, that one may extrapolate a number of different facts about early modern play-going from the commentary that does exist. Even existing documents that are not specifically about attending plays can provide useful hints about the role of theatre in the life of early modern Englishmen and Englishwomen. Charles Whitney, in *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama*, explores a "mode of reception that became second nature" to early modern audiences, a mode that he argues places emphasis "as much on consumption as on production, on appropriation as on contemplation, and on creative re-performance as on creative performance" (I). Agreeing with Whitney's analysis, I would add that the emphasis on the audience's active response and appropriative approach to theatre was one that Renaissance playwrights and players were well aware of, leading them to both respond and contribute heavily to its existence through the use of the metatheatrical mode, a mode which emphasized the audience's presence and agency.

A consideration of even a few of the surviving spectator responses certainly provides evidence to this end. Simon Forman, physician, astrologer, occultist, and self-proclaimed womanizer, gained posthumous infamy due to (likely false) implication in the scandalous Thomas Overbury murder. Satirized in Jonson's *Epicoene* (and possibly *The Alchemist* and *The Devil is an Ass*), he was "remembered on the stage of early modern London as a quack and a conjurer meddling in the affairs of women" (Kassell 2). The stage had played a role in his life as well, with Forman's copious records of his activities including that of many visits to the theater. His commentary on *Macbeth* is perhaps the best known of such records. We find signs of Forman's personal interests in his focus on the encounters with the Witches, the appearance of

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Banquo's ghost and Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking where she is observed by the doctor, all of which he describes in detail. More interesting evidence may be found in a comment he provides on a lost play about Richard II, where Forman speaks disapprovingly of John of Gaunt murdering a seer who predicted that his son would be king: ""This was a pollicie in the common wealthes opinion. But I sai yt was a villianes parte and a Iudas kisse to hang the man for telling him the truth" (1967). While the references are not particularly detailed nor the sentiments sophisticated, they do indicate how Forman brought a particularly personal touch to his response to plays while being aware that his individual response might not match up to "the common wealthes opinion." Forman's commentary "illustrates the active manner in which early modern playgoers could discover meaning that had a particular relevance to their own lives, and could assert and defend controversial opinions" (Whitney 155). The metatheatrical material found in early modern plays certainly spoke to such a tendency, especially in the prologues and epilogues which emphasized individual audience agency and allowed performers to rhetorically eschew blame for negative responses while seeking positive ones.

Such personalized and intellectually active responses to theatre may be found even in those who claimed to have little interest in plays. Robert Tofte, poet and translator, makes few references to theatre in his works and appears (like many Renaissance writers) to have considered lyric poetry superior to dramatic texts. One sonnet in his Petrarchan sequence, *Alba: The Months Minde of a Melancholy Lover* (1598), does describe a reluctant trip to see *Love's Labour's Lost* in performance, where Tofte says he suffers greatly due to his beloved's "scorning of [his] woes":

> *Loves Labor Lost*, I once did see a Play,
> Yclepèd so, so callèd to my paine,
> Which I to heare to my small Joy did stay,
> …

> This *Play* no *Play*, but Plague was unto me,
> For ther I lost the Love I liked most,
> And what to others seemde a Jest to be,
> I, that (in earnest) found unto my cost,
> To every one (save me) twas *Comicall*,
> Whilst *Tragick* like to me it did befall.
> Each Actor plaid in cunning wise his part,
> But chiefly Those enrapt in *Cupids* snare:
> Yet all was fained, twas not from the hart,
> They seemde to grieve, but yet they felt no care:
> Twas I that Griefe (indeed) did beare in brest,
> The others did but make a showe in Jest. (1-3, 7-18)

Tofte's response to the play here, negative as it is, is even more active than Forman's. In a modification of Hamlet's response to the Player's fictional grief for Hecuba, Tofte sees the actors' suffering as "fained, twas not from the hart, / They seemde to grieve, but yet they felt no care," whereas the poet himself is the one wracked with true sorrow. Here, despite his supposed disinterest in theatre, Tofte is both explicitly aware of the fictive nature of what is depicted and makes the intellectual connection between what is depicted on stage and its analogue in the *theatrum mundi* off-stage. Though doing so unhappily—or using the rhetorical/dramatic pose of unhappiness—the poet seeks to take center-stage in his poem, aspiring to a "performative power that casts him as the star in the imminent tragedy of his own life" (Whitney 142). This depiction of the spectator as a performer too is one that was hugely influential to the presence and function of metatheatricality on the early modern stage, allowing metatheater to be not just a referential game, but rather a commentary on the nature of the world that surrounded the stage.

One theater-goer who appears more aware of such commentary than Tofte, as well as much happier to attend plays, was John Davies of Hereford. A poet, "handwriting teacher and tutor to the nobility," he had "long-lasting contacts with the theatre, especially Shakespeare's company" (Vickers 15). Davies' writings contain multiple references to theatrical attendance, dramatic characters, individual plays and specific actors. His comments invariably "affirm the

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importance of the audience's critical participation in the theatre … [which] is created not by

players alone but in and through the collaboration of the distinct authorities of stage and

audience" (Whitney 116). In a verse essay titled *Fortuna vitrea est, quae cum splendet, frangitur*

("Fortune is fragile; after it glistens, it is shattered"), Davies speaks of standing and watching the

demise of great figures on stage:

> Or like a looker on a Tragedie
> Within the Middle Roome, among the Meane,
> I see the fall of State and Maiesty
> While mongst the Presse t'a Piller sure I leane.

A similar idea is expressed in a sonnet which expresses his thoughts on the character of

Tamburlaine, whom he appears to have seen performed in Marlowe's play:

> When with my Minds right Eye, I do behold
> (From nought, made nothing lesse) great Tamburlaine
> (Like *Phaeton*) drawne, encoacht in burnisht Gold,
> Raigning his drawers, who of late did Raigne:
> I deem me blessed in the Womb to be
> Borne as I am, among indiffrent Things.
> No King, nor Slaue, but of the meane degree
> Where *I* see Kings made Slaues, and Slaues made Kings. (1-8)

Davies appears more critically aware than Tofte of the intricate relationship between the

audience-member watching the play and the performers on stage or the character being

performed. Similarly, while Davies' interpretive acts are similar to Forman's (of the fictionalized

John of Gaunt), the former has a deeper awareness of his position as an individual within a

"Presse" of other spectators. The fall of majesty on stage reminds not only Davies, as an

individual, of the advantages of his comparatively mean state, but has a similar message for the

audience as a whole, the "Meane" that are found in the "Middle Room" of the theater. This is the

same sort of message that works directly against the anti-theatricalist claims of Gosson and

which was expressed by Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*, as well as by multiple playwrights in their

prologues and epilogues.

Davies' ability to analyze the characters on stage in view of their metaphoric relation to

the *theatrum mundi* around them also appears to have been influenced by his keen awareness of

the players who performed them and the playwrights who wrote them. In his *Microcosmos: The*

Discovery of the Little World, with the Government Thereof (1603), Davies says, "*Players*, I loue

yee, and your *Qualitie /* As ye are Men, *that* pass-time not abus'd", before going on to

compliment them by saying that, "And though the *stage* doth staine pure gentle *bloud*, / Yet

generous yee are in *minde* and *moode*." In the margins of the text, Davies indicates that he is

specifically referring to Shakespeare and Burbage here. A similar marginal comment is found in

his *Humours Heau'n on Earth: with the Civile Warres of Death and Fortune* (1609), near the

comment that actors are suitable to be "Mirrors … Wherin men saw their faults" because the

actors themselves have so many faults. In his *The Scourge of Folly* (1611), Davies addresses

William Ostler, who takes a painful blow during his performance of a king being killed on stage,

saying, "If thou plaist thy dying part as well / As thy stage-parts thou has no part in hell."

Davies' comments may seem relatively innocuous, but they have significant implications in view

of the context within which Renaissance drama functioned and the influences delineated earlier

in this chapter. At least in part due to regularly attending performances in theaters where the

fictive nature of performance and the need for audience judgment are constantly emphasized,

Davies is clearly aware of the divergence between the fictional character and the performing

actor, as well as of his options as a spectator for critical commentary. While it is impossible to

know for certain how much of the original audiences for early modern drama was comprised of

individuals such as Davies, the nature and context of Renaissance theatre makes it highly unlikely that he was an aberration in this area.

Conclusion

As noted previously, the elements considered in this chapter are only a limited sample of a vast network of intersecting elements, which combined to create the context within which early modern theatre arose and flourished. They are, however, representative of the type of influences which led, both directly and indirectly, to the ubiquity of metatheater in Renaissance drama. In turn, the regular usage of the metatheatrical mode dramatically influenced the influence and manifestation of such elements, in particular the audiences which flocked to Renaissance theaters. The result was a fascinatingly symbiotic interaction between the material conditions within which the drama functioned; the plays, players and playwrights; and the spectators who watched the performances. In the following chapters, I shall delineate the expression of such interaction in four specific plays. A close reading of these dramas will not only illustrate Renaissance metatheater in action but will serve to indicate precisely why it is important—because the metatheatrical moment is the one in which early modern drama speaks most clearly about the conditions within which it functioned and about the manner in which it was originally perceived.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SPECTATOR'S THE THING: METATHEATER

IN *THE SPANISH TRAGEDY*

When shifting from theoretical considerations of the existence and role of metatheater in Renaissance drama to analysis of its concrete realization in specific plays, *The Spanish Tragedy* is a particularly appropriate place to start. Thomas Kyd's play is more replete with metatheatrical subject matter and techniques than any seen previously on the early modern stage, and its enduring popularity indicates that this quality catered well to the audiences and theater of its time. *The Spanish Tragedy* remained in performance through the Renaissance, from its first appearance to the closing of the theaters in 1642. It became such a part of the theatrical lexicon that over the course of the "seventeenth century it was quoted and burlesqued more than any other play, even *Hamlet*" (Gurr, *Playgoing* 168), with quotations from it occurring in at least fifty-nine plays performed between 1591 and 1642 (Dudrap, II.607-631). A less academic—and more amusing—but no less telling piece of evidence is the popular, likely apocryphal, anecdote about a dying woman requesting not the last sacraments but rather, "Hieronimo, Hieronimo, O let me see Hieronimo acted!" The tale, repeated disapprovingly in Richard Brathwaite's *The English Gentlewoman* (1631, 1641) and William Prynne's *Histriomastix* (1633) to illustrate the immoral influence of the public theaters, only underlines the popularity of Renaissance drama in general and Kyd's play in particular.

First performed barely a decade after the opening of the Theatre, *The Spanish Tragedy* actively embraces the nature of the relatively new theatrical spaces within which it would appear. Since (as outlined in Chapter 2) aspirations to verisimilitude were highly problematic, if not

impossible, on the Renaissance stage, Kyd's play eschews any such attempt, instead remaining consistently self-referential about its nature as theatrical performance. In the process of doing so, the play utilizes multiple themes and techniques which would soon be ubiquitous in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Kyd's work in *The Spanish Tragedy* exemplifies the realization on the part of early modern dramatists and players that attempting to gloss over the apparent inadequacies of the early modern stages would be a doomed enterprise and that explicitly embracing the theatricality of their profession would allow them to achieve powerful aesthetic and emotional effects.

Just as it responds to the physical locations where it would be performed, the play also engages directly with the unique nature of the Renaissance audiences for whom it was written. In fact, the play is arguably as engaged with the issue of spectatorship and theatrical performance as any that appeared in its time. As a revenge tragedy, *The Spanish Tragedy* engages heavily with revenge and justice, asking complex questions about their nature, effects and feasibility in society. Using its own (meta)theatricality as both tool and subject for this exploration, the play emphasizes the performative nature of revenge and justice, which must be both acted out, observed and accurately judged. The play emphasizes the theatricality inherent in their exercise, the acute judgment that is required of spectators watching them occur, the complexities of communication between those who perform them and those they perform for, and the ambiguous relationship between appearance (and performance) and reality.

Unfortunately, there is no real evidence for the play's effects on the spectators it was written for, since the "large body of extant comment" on *The Spanish Tragedy* almost exclusively consists of references in other plays and comments by playwrights and producers (Whitney 62). One may, however, draw out certain implications based on its popularity and its

constant exploration of the nature of spectatorship. The play responds to the fact that it would be performed for spectators who (as covered in Chapter 2) were highly active on both physical and verbal levels. *The Spanish Tragedy* adapts to and makes use of their nature, utilizing its explicit theatricality as a tool to require active mental responses as well. By presenting the fictional world it depicts as one built around the same spectatorship that its theater audience is engaged in, the play prevents its audience from considering its themes as a simple emotional pleasure or an abstract intellectual puzzle. This metatheatricality provides the play's treatment of revenge and justice with additional immediacy, constantly reminding its audience that such issues matter not only in the fictional world but also in the world beyond, the *theatrum mundi* that they inhabit— and that they must struggle to decipher and accurately judge what they see (onstage and off), just as the characters in *The Spanish Tragedy* try to do.

The metatheatrical framework

Engagement with such issues and effects are most strongly present in the latter half of the play—in Hieronymo's role as playmaker, in the performance of *Soliman and Perseda*, and in the closing catastrophe—but its groundwork is laid from the very start, with the strongly metatheatrical framing of the drama that is to follow. The opening of Kyd's play displays one of the subtler, if quite pervasive, metatheatrical techniques found on the early modern stage, namely the usage of earlier literary traditions (dramatic and otherwise). There was often an explicit expectation that Renaissance audiences would recognize such borrowing, inevitably adding an additional layer of theatricality to the performance. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd draws heavily on multiple older theatrical traditions, particularly the Latin drama of Seneca and English morality plays. What I would emphasize here, however, are not simply the influences but rather how the playwright reworks them to conform to, and take advantage of, the nature of the

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particular theater(s) for which he is writing. The opening, with the entrance of Revenge and the

Ghost of Andrea, supplies a particularly rich example. In not only their nature but in their

presence and positioning (which is heavily reliant on the physical stage space), these characters

provide a strongly metatheatrical structure and framework for the tragedy. Kyd references and

makes use of this frame throughout the course of the play, especially to interrogate the role of

spectatorship and acute judgment in the functioning of the drama.

It is a critical commonplace that the opening pair of characters in *The Spanish Tragedy*

comprise a chorus, often analogized by scholars to that of Tantalus and the Fury, Megara, in

Seneca's *Thyestes*. Alternatively, some critics claim that the pairing is actually a throwback to a

more medieval model of drama, such as Howard Baker's claim that "ghosts are conspicuous in

earlier English literature, and personifications like Revenge are exclusively medieval" rather than

drawn from Seneca (27). I would argue that Kyd is drawing upon and amalgamating elements

from both of these (and other) sources, heavily reworking them to suit the resources and

exigencies of the early modern stage. The Ghost of Andrea is particularly important in this

regard, performing a role which it does neither in Seneca nor in most (if any) of English

medieval drama—that of a spectator to the play, whose knowledge (or, more precisely, lack

thereof) of upcoming events replicates that of the audience sitting or standing around the stage.

In Seneca's *Thyestes*, Tantalus and the Fury are not a true chorus, but rather enter to serve

as prologues who set the scene and provide "information necessary for the understanding of the

play and foreshadow its end" (Baker 33). Megara, cursing the line of Pelops, commands his

companion:

> Through all this house now rage and fury throw!
> Let them be driven so, and so let either thirst to see
> Each other's blood (1.100-102)

The sentiment may seem superficially similar to Kyd's Revenge claiming that he will:

> …turn their friendship into fell despite,
> Their love to mortal hate, their day to night,
> Their hope into despair, their peace to war,
> Their joys to pain, their bliss to misery (1.5.6-9)

There is, however, a significant distinction between the theatrical function of both speeches.

Firstly, they differ in their chronological placement, since Megara's words occur at the opening

of the play and Revenge reveals this aim only after the first Act of *The Spanish Tragedy* is over.

In contrast to *Thyestes*, when entering at the play's opening, Revenge says:

> Then know, Andrea, that thou art arriv'd
> Where thou shalt see the author of thy death,
> Don Balthazar the prince of Portingale,
> Depriv'd of life by Bel-Imperia. (1.1.86-89)

The key difference lies in the fact that Megara communicates with the purported (since *Thyestes*

is likely a closet drama) audience and departs, while Revenge not only speaks to his audience but

is engaged in joining it, instructing Andrea at the end of their entrance:

> Here sit we down to see the mystery,
> And serve for Chorus in this tragedy. (1.1.90-91)

Revenge's words, in combination with the physical placement of the two figures, indicate that

the pair of them are akin to—though not exactly—a chorus, not simply a prologue or epilogue,

and in this role they share in the viewing of the play just as the audience does. The issue of

spectatorship is especially true in the case of Andrea's Ghost, since he is neither pre-informed

about the eventual end of the play (as Revenge apparently is), nor is he actually a part of the

stage business as a chorus usually would be. He is, in many ways, simply another spectator, with

his presentation and responses as an audience-member contributing heavily to the play's

metatheatrical frame.

When first appearing on stage, the Ghost of Andrea is significantly uncertain why he has been transported to this location, arguably possessing even less knowledge than even the members of the very first audience of *The Spanish Tragedy* about what they are to see performed (since he, presumably, is unaware that the play is described as "Containing the lamentable end of Don Horatio and Bel-Imperia: with the pitiful death of old Hieronimo"). Admittedly, Andrea can delineate some of the background for the play's action when he speaks of his previous life:

> When this eternal substance of my soul
> Did live imprison'd in my wanton flesh,
> Each in their function serving other's need,
> I was a Courtier in the Spanish Court.
> My name was Don Andrea, (1.1.1-5)

Yet, as Andrea describes, for the audience's benefit, his death and descent into the underworld, where he eventually meets "Pluto with his Proserpine" (1.1.76), his narration confirms that he has no idea why—or even how—he is here:

> Forthwith, Revenge, she rounded thee in th' ear,
> And bade thee lead me through the gates of horn,
> Where dreams have passage in the silent night.
> No sooner had she spoke but we were here,
> I wot not how, in twinkling of an eye. (1.1.81-85)

Unlike his guide Revenge, the Ghost lacks foreknowledge of the play's plot, observing the unfolding of events with a mixture of emotions and responses akin to that of the spectators who are watching the play.

The Ghost's similarity to the audience-members surrounding the stage is particularly important to *The Spanish Tragedy*'s metatheatrical explorations. While such on-stage audience figures (as covered in Chapter 2) will be more common in later Renaissance drama, Andrea is a fairly unique creation at this point. As Baker notes:

> Kyd seems to be the first writer to stress the ghost's wonderment at what he sees. The
> Ghost … becomes an amazed spectator of happenings in a realm completely different

from his own. In these happenings he can foresee nothing; he shows no inclinations toward vengeance until, late in the play, he sees his friend murdered and his enemies flaunting their prosperity. The Ghost proves himself the most curious member of the audience. (32)

Baker's comment about the Ghost's inclination (or rather, lack thereof) towards revenge is noteworthy for its accuracy. It is common for scholars to refer to *The Spanish Tragedy* as a play performed in the sight of Andrea's vengeful ghost. Peter Womack, for example, delineating the links between Ghost and audience, says that "[t]he dead are like you: they 'sit … down to see the mystery' (90); they may rejoice or rage at it, but they are powerless to affect it because they are not truly present. Thus the audience is invited to watch the performance through the eyes of a vengeful ghost" (130). However, contrary to Womack's claim, Andrea is explicitly *not* seeking vengeance at his first appearance, any more than any other member of the audience is. Even after viewing the treatment of his killer Balthazar as an honored guest in the play's first Act, the Ghost only complains to Revenge:

> Come we for this from depth of underground,
> To see him feast that gave me my death's wound?
> These pleasant sights are sorrow to my soul:
> Nothing but league, and love and banqueting. (1.6.1-4)

The sentiment, while utterly reasonable for one seeing his slayer feted by the court where he once lived, is hardly a vengeful one.

Even after seeing the murder of his friend Horatio in the next Act, the Ghost speaks more of disappointment and confusion than of his hope to see Balthazar's fall:

> Brought'st thou me hither to increase my pain?
> I look'd that Balthazar should have been slain:
> But 'tis my friend Horatio that is slain,
> And they abuse fair Bel-imperia,
> On whom I doted more than all the world,
> Because she lov'd me more than all the world. (2.6.1-6)

Despite the disappointment and the painful sights that he is forced to view in his position as audience-member, it is only after the third Act that the Ghost calls explicitly for revenge and vengeance:

> Awake, Erichtho; Cerberus, awake;
> Solicit Pluto, gentle Proserpine,
> To combat, Acheron and Erebus.
> For ne'er, by Styx and Phlegethon in hell,
> O'er-ferried Charon to the fiery lakes
> Such fearful sights as poor Andrea sees.
> Revenge, awake. (3.15.1-7)

These responses of the Ghost in many ways mimic and accompany (rather than foreshadow) those of the audience in the theatre. They not only underline his liminal position, somewhere between play character and audience member unable to affect the play's events, but also serve to underline the play's nature as a theatrical spectacle. In emphasizing the presence of the Ghost as spectator and allowing him to verbalize his confusion at what unfolds before him, *The Spanish Tragedy* delineates the difficulty of (and need for) accurate critical judgment in judging the meaning of its stage business.

Like the members of the theater audience whom he resembles, the Ghost "has no vengeful tendencies until he is inspired to them by the events which he is witnessing" and he similarly matches the play's actual revenger in that "[t]he revenge theme, which develops slowly in the mind of Hieronimo, develops with corresponding slowness in the mind of the Ghost" (Baker 34). When the play's audience bemoans Horatio's death, sympathizes with Hieronimo, and is drawn to (and perplexed by) the possibility of revenge, so too is the Ghost, but Andrea does so as a figurative analogue of everyone watching the play in the theater, not as someone separated from them by an imaginary fourth wall (unsurprisingly, since the concept could never truly exist within the physical and ideological dimensions of the Renaissance stage). Despite the

plethora of scholarly claims to the contrary, the Ghost's primary function in the play is not as an exemplar of revenge. After all, *The Spanish Tragedy*'s nature as a revenge tragedy is predicated not on the Ghost's revenge but Hieronimo's. Andrea's position on stage is vital to our understanding of the nature and functioning of the play, especially with regard to the audience that it was written for but, as Anne Barton accurately notes, "[t]he usefulness of the ghost, however, does not really depend upon its intimate connexion with Hieronimo's revenge.... (Andrea) is a link between the two worlds of audience and actors, combining within himself certain elements drawn from each. As such, he helps to define the relationship of reality and illusion" (71). I would, however, place greater emphasis on the Ghost's role as audience-member than as actor (a position which might be truer of Revenge). It is in this aspect that the Ghost is truly important, his inability to accurately judge what he views as a spectator underlining the complex blurring of appearance and reality that is at play in *The Spanish Tragedy*

What often goes unremarked on in discussions of the Ghost's philosophical positioning as audience-member is the influence of the material space that he inhabits. The Ghost's physical placement in the theater underlines and mediates his function in the play. Most choruses inhabit and traverse the primary stage space, as do prologues and epilogues, especially (and usually only) when framing the moments when other actors will inhabit the stage. In contrast, the Ghost (with Revenge) is unmoving but constantly present. This particular technique appears multiple times in Renaissance drama (as noted in Chapter 2), as in *The Taming of the Shrew* (performed purportedly for Christopher Sly, though he disappears from the existing text(s) long before the play's end) or later, much more explicitly, in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (see Chapter 5). It is, however, new when Kyd's play appears, Revenge and the Ghost essentially inaugurating such a framework in early modern drama. More importantly, the two of them inhabit a liminal but

important segment of the staging area, one which the spectators of the play would often expect other audience-members to occupy. Though a few other possibilities may be mooted, it is most likely that the Ghost and Revenge first appear on one of the balconies at the rear of the stage. Revenge suggests, "Here sit we down…" and they do, never leaving during the entirety of the play.

Hence, the Ghost and Revenge not only watch all of *The Spanish Tragedy* but, more importantly, are watched while doing so. The spectators, while responding to the events on stage, simultaneously observe the two characters doing so as well, a fact that underlines *The Spanish Tragedy*'s inherent metatheatricality and the active intellectual engagement which it required of its audience (and, I would argue, drew much of its popularity from). The two characters occupy not just any spectatorial position but the most important one, socially and physically. It is also one which the spectators would expect other audience-members to occupy and which performers might also use. As Andrew Gurr notes, the balcony area was "occasionally used as a supplementary playing area in conjunction with the stage itself, but more often used to accommodate the lords who paid most and whose rooms gave them the closest view of the stage along with the privilege of being most in view themselves" (*Shakespearean Stage* 151). While modern, 21st century audiences faced with a representation of an outdoor Renaissance theatre, such as in the 1997 reconstruction of the Globe, are likely to consider the balcony or gallery area exclusively as a part of the stage, such an assumption would not have been shared by Elizabethan and Jacobean spectators who attended *The Spanish Tragedy*.

In the early modern theaters, the presence of an audience on all sides of the stage, wedded to the lack of a proscenium arch, served to remove the front-stage/backstage distinction that we are so familiar with. Many members of Kyd's original audiences would presumably have seen

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performances at the inn-yards that predated outdoor theaters, such as the Rose, where Kyd's play

likely debuted (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 297). These viewers would have seen burghers and

townswomen leaning out of an upper window or standing on inn balconies, applauding, booing,

and commenting loudly on the performance below. As the public theaters steadily increased in

popularity, spectators would grow equally used to seeing the balconies occupied by the "richest

spectators …, the object of all eyes" (Gurr and Ichikawa 7). They would also have seen

performers appear on the balcony, as they do in Act 2, Scene 2, of *The Spanish Tragedy*, where a

stage direction says Pedringano "showeth all to the Prince and Lorenzo, placing them in secret

[above]," in a gallery similar to, perhaps even beside, the one where the Ghost and Revenge are

sitting. Sometimes, in plays such as *Titus Andronicus* or *Henry VI, Part 1*, both of which were

performed on the same stage as Kyd's (Chambers, Bentley), if there was a particularly good

crowd the same gallery area might be occupied by both players and audience (Gurr and Ichikawa

7). The Ghost and Revenge, between them, occupy both of these roles. Their physical location

both underlines the fact and displays how Kyd's play adapts to the nature of the theaters in which

it was performed.

The manner in which the Ghost and Revenge occupy these divergent roles may be aided

by the aforementioned physical positioning, but it relies primarily on the analogous difference in

the knowledge that they possess of events to come. Andrea, as noted, is essentially a spectator

new to this particular drama, possessing a little information about the play to come, but neither

fully certain what will occur, nor able to change the outcome (nor, on multiple occasions, to

interpret it correctly). Revenge, conversely, is vastly better informed about the future, so much so

that he actually falls asleep by the end of Act 3, like a spectator who has seen the same

performance one too many times. Or he might be better compared to one of the players or a

stage-director, as he seems to claim when awakened by the complaining Ghost:

> Nor dies Revenge, although he sleep awhile;
> For in unquiet quietness is feigned
> And slumb'ring is a common worldly wile.
> Behold, Andrea, for an instance, how
> Revenge hath slept, and then imagine thou
> What 'tis to be subject to destiny. (3.15.23-28)

Not only does Revenge repeatedly emphasize his foreknowledge of the events that will be

staged, but at this moment he displays his control of the stage space as well. Unlike the Ghost,

who has neither foreknowledge nor control of future events, Revenge possesses both, which he

quite explicitly displays here. Temporarily pausing the ongoing play to illuminate the confused

Ghost, he co-opts the stage space and calls forth a dumb show, which he interprets for Andrea's

benefit:

> REVENGE: Behold, Andrea, for an instance, how
> Revenge hath slept, and then imagine thou
> What 'tis to be subject to destiny. [*Enter a Dumb Show.*]
> GHOST: Awake, Revenge; reveal this mystery.
> REVENGE: The two first, the nuptial torches bore
> As brightly burning as the mid-day's sun;
> But after them doth Hymen hie as fast,
> Clothed in Sable and a Saffron robe,
> And blows them out, and quencheth them with blood,
> As discontent that things continue so.
> GHOST: Sufficeth me; thy meaning's understood (3.15.24-34)

This explanation and display serve to emphasize two elements that have been evident from the

very opening of *The Spanish Tragedy*. The first is the importance—and difficulty—of audience

interpretation of the stage activities in this play. Andrea, presumably like many of the spectators,

has thoroughly misunderstood what is occurring on stage, since "he is completely gulled when

Hieronimo turns the tables by gulling Lorenzo about the wedding play" (Barber 145).

Underlining both the difficulty of accurate interpretation and its necessity, the Ghost is not the

only character in the play to bear an explicitly metatheatrical resemblance to the less discerning members of the audience. One such example is Isabella, who, also "misunderstanding Hieronimo's pretended reconciliation with Lorenzo" (153), rails about her husband's behavior moments before committing suicide:

> Make haste, Hieronimo, to hold excused
> Thy negligence in pursuit of their deaths,
> Whose hateful wrath bereaved him of his breath.
> Ah, nay, thou doest delay their deaths,
> Forgives the murderers of thy noble son,
> And none but I bestir me -- to no end. (4.2.29-34)

Here, misunderstanding leads to death, as it will repeatedly (and has, previously) in the fictional world of the play. It is clear that careful attention and interpretation are as important to the play as they are complicated. The second, and arguably even more crucial, element illustrated by Revenge's calling forth of the dumb show is the metatheatrical connection between the performance on stage and the world beyond it. This moment (and the play as a whole) emphasizes the idea of the *theatrum mundi*, of the world as a stage, where spectatorship, attention and interpretation are just as important as in *The Spanish Tragedy*.

The protagonist as playmaker

The above effects are tied into the presentation of the entire play as a theatrical performance for the benefit of Andrea's Ghost. While *The Spanish Tragedy* is generally considered the first great exemplar of the play-within-a-play, it is not only Hieronimo's performance of *Soliman and Perseda* which is a play-within-a-play, but *The Spanish Tragedy* itself. Kyd's play inaugurates this theatrical strategy and his presentation of *The Spanish Tragedy* as entirely a play-within-a-play heavily inflects its meaning and effect on the audience. As Robert J. Nelson notes, this theatrical technique is one "which 'shows the seams,' turning the dramaturgy inside out," and is one "which often defines, as it were, the play within which it

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occurs" (ix). And if the "relationship of the inner play to the outer play prefigures the relationship between the outer play and the reality within which it occurs: life," or if the "play within the play is the theater reflecting on itself, on its own paradoxical seeming" (Nelson 10), how much more constant and explicit is that reflection when the "inner" and "outer play" are virtually the same? The dumb show, used previously in plays such as *Gorboduc*—where one occurs before every Act, to either delineate what has occurred off-stage in the interim or symbolically explicate the following action—often reminded Renaissance spectators that they were at a theatrical performance, providing a visual precursor of the performance to follow. The technique of the play-within-a-play significantly heightens the effect, not only providing such a reminder but adding a not-so-subtle indicator of how the action, whether of the individual play or of the theatrical enterprise in general, reflects the existence of the wider world that surrounds it.

In the case of *The Spanish Tragedy*, even the least discerning of spectators would have had difficulty ignoring the fact that the play constantly references the idea of the *theatrum mundi*. Richard Hornby, examining the use of the play-within-the-play in the Renaissance, says that the "all-time metadramatic record, however, must go to Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* … This amazing play contains *both* the framed and the inset type of play within the play" (37). The framed type mentioned here refers to the presence of the Ghost and Revenge as spectators for whom *The Spanish Tragedy* as a whole is performed, while the inset type refers to the dumb show and *Soliman and Perseda*, which occur as plays set within the larger drama. While such structural elements contribute heavily to the sense of the *theatrum mundi*, what especially underlines its centrality to the play is Kyd's use of a relatively new metatheatrical technique which would subsequently become a highly significant part of Renaissance dramaturgy—the fictional character as actor and playmaker. The technique is exemplified (and certainly

popularized, if not actually inaugurated) by Hieronimo, whose actions serve to again not only reinforce the inherent (meta)theatricality of *The Spanish Tragedy* but face its audience with the constant need—and, paradoxically, potential impossibility—of accurate critical interpretation.

Characters who, while inhabiting the world of the play, explicitly and metatheatrically informed the audience of their intentions and plans for the other characters, did exist well before Kyd's play came to the stage. The medieval Vice was one such, regularly pausing to take the spectators into his confidence while busily bustling back and forth in an attempt to win control over the soul of mankind. As noted in Chapter 2, the tragedy *Cambyses* utilizes the character Ambidexter (identified as "the Vice" in the list of characters) in a similar role. He identifies himself and his nature at first appearance, explicitly addressing the audience:

> To see if I can all men beguile.
> Ha! My name? My name would ye so fain know?
> Yeah, iwis, shall ye, and that with all speed!
> I have forgot it: therefore I cannot show
> Ah! ah! Now I have it! I have it, indeed!
> My name is Ambidexter. I signify one
> That with both hands finely can play.
> Now with King Cambyses, and by and by gone. (2.20-27)

Despite his existence in a tragedy, Ambidexter is primarily a comic character (as the Vice commonly was), and his position is often that of a metaphorical stage manager, informing the spectators of his future actions and then driving the other characters, through lies, flattery and (more rarely) threats, to achieve what he has previously promised. Hieronimo is a spiritual, if far more complex, descendant of Ambidexter and an influential ancestor to those that would follow. In fact, though Kyd's protagonist predates characters such as Hamlet, Cleopatra and Henry V— all of whom, I shall argue later (in Chapter 4), symbolically represent the Renaissance playwright and/or actor—he possesses a quality that they do not. Hieronimo is not simply a metaphorical representation of the artist that his creator was, but he is actually one himself. He admits to

"being a poet in his youth, and after his death is consigned to the realm of the legendary musician Orpheus" (Womack 130). Hieronimo's identity as artist (and especially playwright) is emphasized throughout *The Spanish Tragedy* and is central to the play's exploration of theatricality.

Though his official position in the Spanish court is that of Knight Marshal, dispenser of the king's justice, Hieronimo seems equally to be in charge of the court's entertainment, "as if the Spanish court had combined the office of Knight Marshal with that of Master of the Revels" (Womack 130). When the Portuguese Ambassador visits the Spanish court, it is Hieronimo that the King of Spain calls upon to provide the dramatic performance for their feast:

> But where is old Hieronimo, our Marshal?
> He promised us, in honor of our guest,
> To grace our banquet with some pompous jest.
> [*Enter Hieronimo with a Drum, three Knights, each his Scutcheon; then he fetches three Kings; they take their Crowns and them captive.*] (1.4.136-138)

From the standpoint of the play's plot, this masque sets the stage well in advance for the later, climactic performance of *Soliman and Perseda* that Hieronimo will use to achieve his revenge. His apparent position as playmaker to the Spanish court in this, the first Act, provides narrative justification for what might otherwise seem a very odd moment in the last Act, when Balthazar tells Hieronimo:

> It pleased you,
> At the entertainment of the Ambassador,
> To grace the King so much as with a show:
> Now, were your study so well furnished,
> As for the passing of the first night's sport
> To entertain my father with the like,
> Or any such-like pleasing motion,
> Assure yourself, it would content them well. (4.1.59-66)

However, Hieronimo's position as playmaker has much more of an effect on Kyd's play (and, as noted, on the future history of Renaissance drama) than simply providing an excuse to set up the

play's catastrophe. It allows the playwright to again remind the audience that they sit within the walls of a theater, watching a fictional entertainment, and to comment critically and metatheatrically on the nature of this dramatic enterprise that they are engaged in.

The Spanish Tragedy, as all revenge tragedies do, is heavily engaged with the issue of justice. Hieronimo's role as artist mediates the play's treatment of the subject, placing emphasis on the importance—and difficulties—of interpretation. Just as art and performance require acute thought, awareness and judgment, so too does the world that surrounds it (especially since it too is heavily dependent on performance). Peter Womack, in speaking of his function in *The Spanish Tragedy*, says:

> … the provider of justice is also the provider of entertainment—and in his culminating tragedy, with real (deserved) deaths on stage, the two functions merge into one. Thus the audience have another reason for loving Hieronimo: he not only represents them on stage, but also offers them an idea of the theatre itself as a place where the injustices of life are put right. (Womack 130)

While I agree with much of Womack's argument, I would argue for a less sanguine interpretation of Hieronimo's final achievement. Exactly how neatly the end of *The Spanish Tragedy* provides justice is a matter for debate. Jonathan Crewe, for example, in emphasizing the play's Senecan parallels, focuses on the way Hieronimo "reenacts the Senecan impulse to annihilate representation as such" (103). Crewe argues that the final slaughter is only partly about justice, that even though Hieronimo "nominally gets even for the killing of his son, the motive even of wild justice has been overtaken in his mind by the project of converting a theater of courtly entertainment into one of cruel rigor. Such is the coup that his court position as master of the revels uniquely permits him" (103-104). As with Womack, I quibble with Crewe's area of emphasis. Hieronimo, throughout the play, has served to explore the problems of representation, and interpretation, on the early modern stage. After the masque of the three Knights is

completed, the King of Spain says: "Hieronimo, this masque contents mine eye, / Although I sound not well the mystery" (1.4.136-138). Accurate critical judgment of theatrical performance here, as elsewhere in *The Spanish Tragedy*, is complicated—and open to revision based on the viewer's preconceptions and prejudices. Hieronimo's detailed (and historically inaccurate) explanation is interrupted by the King's interjections, who re-interprets the masque's depiction of Spanish and Portuguese conquest by England to console the Ambassador regarding Portugal's recent defeat. The same scene is simultaneously viewed and very differently interpreted by Andrea's Ghost, who cares little about such matters and complains to Revenge that he sees "Nothing but league, and love and banqueting" (1.6.1-4). All that occurs on the stage—and in the *theatrum mundi* which it metatheatrically represents—is open to interpretation and questioning. Contrary to Crewe's claim, Hieronimo's play of *Soliman and Perseda* (and its violent results) does not eliminate such questions. It heightens them to a climax, problematizing both justice and representation, forcing the audience to simultaneously consider and question the nature of each.

Staging justice

In theory, Hieronimo's *Soliman and Perseda* would raise such questions even if considered in isolation, but the effect is significantly heightened by the earlier contents of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Representations of justice, as well as questions (implicit and otherwise) about its nature and ideal application, proliferate in Kyd's play. A strong link between the subjects of justice—especially state justice, which Hieronimo, as Knight Marshal originally represents in the play—and theatricality is already present at the time that public theater arises in Renaissance England: the state execution. Elizabethan and Jacobean drama made regular use of the link, with the presentation of violence, execution and justice on the stage often resembling the highly

theatrical nature of the state execution. Such resemblance was usually implicit, presumably to

avoid censorship. As James Shapiro argues:

> Since both the public theaters and the public authorities enacted high drama on scaffolds
> before crowds of spectators, it is easy to understand the need to keep these two kinds of
> performances distinct….To permit the theater to imitate state violence could undermine
> the terrible power of officially sanctioned violence by showing it often enough to make it
> familiar or by resituating it within ethically and politically ambiguous contexts. (100)

This argument rings especially true when one considers the strong relationship between the

public theaters and staged violence of various kinds. Not only did the public theaters emerge

from, and often border, sites where the popular sports of bull- and bear-baiting occurred, but they

sometimes even served as the location for actual human execution. John Stow's *Annales, or a*

Generale Chronicle of England from Brute until the present yeare of Christ (1615) mentions

hangings occurring at the Theatre around the time that *The Spanish Tragedy* was first produced.

In 1588, W. Gunter, a foreign priest, was executed there on August 28, as was another priest,

William Hartley, on October 1 (Chambers, 2:396, n.2). In view of this physical and metaphorical

proximity of stage performance to state executions, I would argue that even the faintest gesture at

the subject, implicit or explicit, inevitably took on a metatheatrical flavor that audiences of the

time would find difficult to ignore. The clear resemblance between the two forms of performance

would be particularly evident and thematically important to spectators viewing Renaissance

revenge tragedy, which ceaselessly explored the emotional impetus to deliver private justice

when the state failed to publicly do so—and the pitfalls inherent in such actions. *The Spanish*

Tragedy is emblematic of this phenomenon, simultaneously presenting explicit depictions of the

machinery of state justice (to a degree exceptional in early modern drama) and exploring its

weaknesses. In doing so—more importantly for the purposes of this study—the play places

particular emphasis on its inherent theatricality and the resultant difficulty of accurate judgment in its application.

Displaying the actual mechanisms of state justice—and their use—on the Renaissance stage was highly unusual. State execution of characters occurs often in the plots of early modern drama, but they usually occur offstage and are then described by a messenger, such as the execution of Junior in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (3.8). On the rare occasion when the executioner's scaffold is brought forth in full view of the audience, the impending execution is usually forestalled, such as when the villain D'Amville amusingly brains himself (5.2) at the climax of *The Atheist's Tragedy*. In contrast to such careful avoidance of direct depiction of state executions, Shapiro notes, *The Spanish Tragedy* "stands as a striking exception. Its audience watches as Pedringano is tried, condemned and 'turned off' by a hangman, and witnesses as well the preparations for the torture and execution of Alexandro, who is bound 'to the stake' onstage and prepared to be burned to death" (100). What is just as noteworthy, in my estimation, and substantially more representative of other early modern drama, is Kyd's simultaneous emphasis on the theatricality of these events and the need for critical judgment in deciphering the precise interplay of appearance and reality in each case.

The case of Alexandro is by far the simpler of the two 'executions,' occurring as an apparently inconsequential subplot over the course of only two scenes (1.3 and 3.1) and seeming to provide a mirror to themes and elements the play dwells more strongly on via other characters and events. Thematically, it serves to enlarge the play's engagement with the subject of political corruption, which is shown to exist in both the Spanish court and the Portuguese one, resulting in a sense of universal (and not simply localized) corruption. Villuppo, whose lies lead to Alexandro's condemnation as a traitor, is a minor version of more sophisticated plotters such as

Lorenzo (and even Hieronimo). Similarly, Alexandro's seemingly impending fate when he is

bound to the stake (3.1.48) prefigures the situation of Pedringano only six scenes later. But

perhaps most importantly, these two scenes once more place the subject of theatrical appearance

and reality squarely before the spectators of the play.

When Villuppo makes his false accusation, beginning with the specious claim that he will

only relate "that truth which these mine eyes have seen" (1.3.59), the theater audience (having

seen Balthazar alive in the preceding scene) is well aware that the Portuguese nobleman is lying.

But of the people on stage with him, only Alexandro knows the truth, and he can do little more

than cry out in disbelief, "Oh, wicked forgery! Oh, traitorous miscreant!" (1.3.72). His simple

honesty contrasts to the more performative falsehoods of Villuppo:

> Then hear that truth which these mine eyes have seen:
> When both the armies were in battle joined,
> Don Balthazar, amidst the thickest troops,
> To win renown did wondrous feats of arms:
> Amongst the rest I saw him, hand-to-hand,
> In single fight with their Lord-General;
> Till Alexandro, that here counterfeits
> Under the color of a duteous friend,
> Discharged his pistol at the Prince's back,
> As though he would have slain their General;
> And therewithal Don Balthazar fell down;
> And when he fell, then we began to fly:
> But, had he lived, the day had sure been ours. (1.3.59-71)

Unsurprisingly, as is usually the case in *The Spanish Tragedy*, persuasiveness and performance

wins over unvarnished truth. The Viceroy is not just persuaded instantly of Alexandro's guilt but

confidently conjures up motivations for his supposed actions, with a creativity that any ad-

libbing actor would be proud of:

> Aye, aye, my nightly dreams have told me this.
> Thou false, unkind, unthankful, trait'rous beast,
> Wherein had Balthazar offended thee,
> That thou shouldst thus betray him to our foes?

> Was't Spanish gold that bleared so thine eyes,
> That thou couldst see no part of our deserts?
> Perchance, because thou art Terceira's Lord,
> Thou hadst some hope to wear this diadem,
> If first my son and then myself were slain;
> But thy ambitious thought shall break thy neck.
> Aye, this was it that made thee spill his blood,
> [*Takes the crown and puts it on again.*]
> But I'll now wear it til thy blood be spilt.

Alexandro's despairing plea, "Vouchsafe, dread Sovereign, to hear me speak," (1.3.88) is summarily ignored as he is hauled off to await execution. The exercise of justice, in the world of *The Spanish Tragedy*, is mediated (and often hindered) by the powerful elements of performance and theatrical appearance. Alexandro's eventual freedom and the downfall of Villuppo occur not because of the justness (or lack thereof) of their individual causes, but because the Portuguese Ambassador fortuitously enters with letters from Balthazar. Only this lucky eventuality saves Alexandro from becoming the central figure in a grimmer theatrical performance, that of state execution, in preparation for which he is already bound to the stake when rescued. The problematic theatricality of the state is subtly gestured at in the Alexandro-Villuppo subplot and, to a more explicit and sophisticated degree, in the execution of Pedringano. In both cases, by making explicit the metatheatrical connections between the performances on stage and those that fill the *theatrum mundi*, Kyd's play underlines the complexities of justice and the judgment required in accurately deciphering its functioning.

Pedringano's execution, presented in painstaking detail, presents a particularly well-recognized form of public spectacle on the theater's stage. The scene's metatheatricality is heightened by the fact that many of the characters involved, especially Pedringano and the boy, are playing roles on stage which diverge from other characters' expectations and knowledge (and sometimes even their own). It also heavily undercuts the theatrical solemnity of such state

executions, partly within the world of the play via Pedringano's irreverent behavior and partly on a metatheatrical level by questioning the validity and effectuality of such ceremonies in the pursuance of justice. Hieronimo, opening the scene, speaks sorrowfully of his own continuing lack of access to justice:

> Thus must we toil in other men's extremes,
> That know not how to remedy our own;
> And do them justice, when unjustly we,
> For all our wrongs, can compass no redress.
> But shall I never live to see the day,
> That I may come (by justice of the heavens)
> To know the cause that may my cares allay?
> This toils my body, this consumeth age,
> That only I to all men just must be,
> And neither gods nor men be just to me. (3.6.1-10)

But Hieronimo's hopes of at least bringing justice to others by punishing Pedringano as he deserves are already doomed, since Pedringano (unbeknownst to those trying him) is only a pawn working on behalf of Lorenzo.

The issue of a lack of knowledge both contributes to the scene's metatheatricality and is vital to understanding the manner in which it functions. Almost every character on stage is engaged in a performative act while lacking important information about the precise nature—and validity—of what they are performing. Pedringano, for example, continually switches back and forth between the roles of a penitent and an impudent criminal, believing that he is exempt from the results of the trial due to an impending pardon from Lorenzo (which, he believes, is carried by the Boy). Hieronimo performs the role of judge, unaware of the actual reasoning for Pedringano's murder of Serberine, and the Officers and Hangman play out their appointed parts, believing that Hieronimo's judgement of Pedringano is complete and accurate. Arguably only the Boy, dispatched by Lorenzo to beguile Pedringano with an empty box (which is promised to contain his pardon), is fully conversant of the reality of the scene. And he too has a part to

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perform, standing wordlessly near the scaffold and often pointing to the box with his finger (3.6.67-68), to embolden Pedringano to further play his futile role.

While this scene is seemingly a performance of court justice on the stage, actual justice does not occur due to the varying degrees of information and the performative nature of the characters, none of whom—whether intentionally or not—are fully playing the role that they seem to. Just as was the case with the Alexandro/Villuppo subplot, theatricality and performance heavily mediate the nature, or even possibility, of justice in the world of *The Spanish Tragedy*, well before Hieronimo woefully realizes that "Justice is exiled from this earth" (3.13.140). As Pedringano quickly discovers to his detriment and others are soon to experience, what seems to be only an amusing performance can easily be a more dangerous and troubling reality. Keen critical awareness and knowledge are required to decipher the difference, and relationship, between the two. And, troublingly, even discernment and detailed information may not be enough to see through the veil between—and intermixing of—appearance and reality.

Soliman and Perseda

The relationship between appearance and reality is presented in the most complicated and nuanced fashion in the closing scenes of *The Spanish Tragedy*, revolving around Hieronimo's *Soliman and Perseda*, which are also the most highly and explicitly metatheatrical since the play's opening. These scenes bring the theme of justice and revenge to a climax, placing arguably even more emphasis on the issues of performance, spectatorship and the complexities of accurate judgment which the play has consistently engaged with.

It is perhaps due to this complex combination of effects that critics diverge dramatically on precisely what *Soliman and Perseda* (and its aftermath) achieves. Shapiro, speaking favorably of the radical elements of *The Spanish Tragedy*, argues that "Hieronimo's court spectacle only

attains [its] power when it oversteps the bounds of what we would normally consider theater" (100). Womack, equally sanguine about the positive effects of Hieronimo's actions but placing more emphasis on justice, argues that *Soliman and Perseda* "turns into an instance of good theatricality, where the pretenses are ripped open and the inner truths publicly displayed. This violent second-order performance restores the integrity of plays and objects and allows the play to end" (131). Others describe the murders (and Hieronimo's subsequent suicide) as enacting violence on the concept of stage performance. Jonathan Crewe, as noted earlier, sees the play as mirroring the violence and themes of Seneca, where "'Mad' Hieronymo attempts such annihilation at the end of *The Spanish Tragedy* by reducing dramatic exchanges to babble (Babel) and by scripting parts in his play within the play for self-immolating murderers who will commit real revenge-murders" (103). In a similar vein, Robert J. Nelson sees Hieronimo's reach extending well beyond the fictional world of the Spanish court, claiming that the character's final actions "merge the real and the unreal and so leave us totally without perspective in a world of chaos" (29). It is perhaps fitting that a play heavily engaged with on the problematic nature of spectatorship and interpretation should lead to such dramatically different responses.

Despite their divergences, three of these readings seem to have a particular assumption in common—that the performance and aftermath of Hieronimo's play somehow steps beyond the boundaries of "what we would normally consider theater" (Shapiro), resulting in a blending of "the real and the unreal" (Nelson) and an attempt to actually "annihilate representation" (Crewe). Even the fourth, Womack's argument that the performance of *Soliman and Perseda* "restores the integrity of plays and objects," implies that what occurred earlier in *The Spanish Tragedy* was an example of "bad theatricality" (131). However, a close consideration of the history of early modern theatre and dramaturgy, not just after *The Spanish Tragedy* but before it as well, reveals

that the metatheatrical and intellectual pyrotechnics of *Soliman and Perseda* are utterly

representative of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Hieronimo, crafting and bringing his plot to

fruition, is a more sophisticated descendant of characters such as *Cambyses*' Ambidexter and an

ancestor to ones like Iago. The presentation, indulgence in, and simultaneous questioning of,

revenge—and their occurrence within a significantly metatheatrical frame—will occur over and

over in Renaissance drama. Shapiro might be correct in that this is not "what we would normally

consider theater" if referring to 20th or 21st century audiences, but we might also be confused if

a modern performance of *The Spanish Tragedy* culminated in the various bodies strewing the

stage at the play's end then arising to join the rest of the cast in a jig. That too, like essentially all

of the components of the closing scenes of Kyd's play, would be what the playgoers of

Elizabethan London considered theater. The performance of *Soliman and Perseda* is not an

aberration, but simply a rich—and representative—example of the metatheatricality inherent in

early modern drama, especially the demands which it made upon its audience.

The scene that introduces the subject of *Soliman and Perseda* (4.1) also heightens the

already explicit engagement with metatheater in *The Spanish Tragedy* by returning to an element

introduced much earlier—Hieronimo's role as a creator of plays. His dual position of revenger

and metaphorical playmaker is explicitly emphasized soon after the appearance of Balthazar and

Lorenzo—and perhaps more subtly, for the more discerning spectators, in his words to Bel-

Imperia as the other two enter: "the plot's already in my head" (4.1.51). Once the murderers of

his son request his aid in creating a drama for the entertainment of the visiting Portuguese

monarch, Hieronimo describes himself as follows:

> When I was young, I gave my mind
> And plied myself to fruitless Poetry;
> Which though it profit the professor naught,
> Yet is it passing pleasing to the world.

> ...
> When in Toledo there I studied,
> It was my chance to write a Tragedy,
> See here, my Lords -- [*He shows them a book.*]
> Which, long forgot, I found this other day. (4.1.70-73, 76-79)

This self-presentation—and the fact that Hieronimo's vengeance is to be accomplished via the vehicle of a stage play—achieves multiple effects, within the world of the play, on the audience in the theater within which it is staged, and in the history of early modern drama.

Hieronimo's metatheatrical reference to himself as a playwright once more emphasizes the parallels that *The Spanish Tragedy* has already drawn between the functioning of the dramatic fiction and the *theatrum mundi* around it. Even more interesting is the fact that Hieronimo's narration of his intended drama's plot directly references another play, *Soliman and Perseda*, within the repertoire of the London playing companies. Self-advertisement might be an obvious motive here, but whether the latter play (attributed to him primarily due to Hieronimo's allusion) was Kyd's own or not, the appearance of its plot as a play-within-a-play in *The Spanish Tragedy* only underlines how acceptable it was in the early modern theater to (by our standards) draw a watching audience out of immersion in the current play to remind them that they are only watching one amongst a large repertoire. Whereas such references would be inimical on a stage where a willing suspension of disbelief was desired (or achievable), they proliferate in early modern drama, actually outnumbering the literary and esoteric references that scholars are more often drawn to, with writers using "far more allusions to the familiar stage repertoire than to even the most standard of the schoolbooks" (Gurr, *Playgoing* 101). Many of these allusions are multi-layered in effect, displaying as much thematic depth and resonance as more literary references. Hieronimo's evocation of *Soliman and Perseda* presumably piqued audience interest, firstly, by introducing a recognizable reference, and, secondly, by implicitly asking them to consider what

relevance it might have to his (and Bel-Imperia's) planned revenge. Hieronimo, before or after his exchange with Balthazar and Lorenzo, never explicitly explains the relationship between his tragedy and his plan for revenge, but the cannier audience-members might have noted that the plot of *Soliman and Perseda* features a young woman whose knightly lover is murdered by a powerful royal who desires her, which drives her to slay the murderer and commit suicide in turn. This is precisely the current situation and soon-to-be fate of Bel-Imperia, making the reference a metatheatrical clue to be deciphered by the discerning even as those less so may settle for being amused by the self-referential allusion to another play.

The call on the active critical faculties on the audience by the reference to *Soliman and Perseda* is heightened by the placement of the scene in which Hieronymo introduces it, since Act Four Scene One is neatly framed by moments of overt metatheatricality and failed critical judgment. Only seconds before Hieronymo and Bel-Imperia appear on stage to discuss their revenge, Andrea's indignant Ghost wakes the sleeping Revenge, expressing his disappointment at what he sees—or, more precisely, thinks he sees—occurring on stage beneath him. Revenge's admonitions and the dumb-show he conjures forth make it clear to the Ghost that he, like many in the audience, is deficient in judgment and needs to be critically keener. Even as the Ghost is seemingly mollified and presumably reassured by the exchanges in the following scene, Scene Two of Act Four brings forth another individual with an—in her case, fatal—inability to decipher the true meaning of Hieronymo's theatrical performances of friendship with his son's murderers. This is the scene mentioned earlier, where Isabella, Hieronimo's wife, enters the stage to bewail the loss of her son Horatio and curse her husband:

> Hieronimo, make haste to see thy son;
> For sorrow and despair hath cited me
> To hear Horatio plead with Rhadamanth:
> Make haste, Hieronimo, to hold excused

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Thy negligence in pursuit of their deaths
Whose hateful wrath bereaved him of his breath.
Ah nay, thou doest delay their deaths,
Forgives the murderers of thy noble son,
And none but I bestir me -- to no end. (4.2.26-34)

Her speech and the suicide which follows are not just tragically ironic in their display of misunderstanding and in their placement in the play, occurring immediately after Hieronimo has revealed the pretense in his actions and explained precisely how his stagecraft (as both actor and playwright) will enable his revenge. Isabella's speech gestures at issues of performance, but there is also an explicit reference, when she conjures up an image of her son chiding her: "See, where his Ghost solicits with his wounds / Revenge on her that should revenge his death" (4.2.24-25). One may imagine the actor playing Isabella pointing up to the heavens above, to the balcony where physically sits not Horatio's ghost but the Ghost of his friend, perhaps shaking his head and wordlessly imploring her not to kill herself. Here again, Kyd's play utilizes metatheatrical material to re-emphasize the need for keen perception and active critical judgment in the audience that watches any performance.

The actual performance of *Soliman and Perseda* simply brings to a head all the thematic and structural expressions and explorations of metatheatricality which fill Kyd's play. As a play-within-a-play, it poses similar questions to others that will come after it, in plays and genres as divergent as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*. Kyd's iteration of the device goes a step further, straining audience judgment and understanding in a direction that only a few other such plays-within-a-play go. As Hornby notes, "the experience of the audience seeing *The Spanish Tragedy* is thus not only triple-layered—the play within the play within the play—but also ambiguous, as the principal inset play intrudes back upon the main play" (37). *Soliman and Perseda* intentionally strives to make it unclear to the audience, even if only for a few minutes,

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precisely what it is that they are witnessing. As noted earlier, Hieronimo informs Bel-Imperia

and the audience that *Soliman and Perseda* will enable him to achieve revenge, but at no point

does he explicate the details of his plot. Even his short soliloquy before the scene of the

performance only belabors the fact that his revenge is to be theatrical:

> Behooves thee then, Hieronimo, to be revenged.
> The plot is laid of dire revenge:
> On, then, Hieronimo, pursue revenge,
> For nothing wants but acting of revenge. (4.3.27-30)

The lack of explicit information simultaneously titillates the audience and requires spectators to

be attentive and utilize their critical judgment to decipher the meaning of *Soliman and Perseda*.

This requirement is emphasized—and complicated—by a seemingly peculiar choice on

Kyd's part, namely to have the performance of *Soliman and Perseda* occur "in unknown

languages / That it may breed the more variety" (4.1.172-173). It is impossible to be certain

whether the original performances of *The Spanish Tragedy* actually required the characters in

Hieronimo's play to each speak a different language. The note appearing in the printed form of

the play—G*entlemen, this play of Hieronimo, in sundry languages, was thought good to be set

down in English more largely, for the easier understanding to every public reader*—might have

been utilized in the theater as well to allow the characters of *Soliman and Perseda* to speak in

English. There is, however, some textual evidence that the play was actually performed in the

varied languages. Balthazar's lines (as Soliman) which explicitly announce the arrival of Erasto

(Lorenzo) are followed, upon his arrival, by the King saying, "Here comes Lorenzo: look upon

the plot, / And tell me, brother, what part plays he?" (4.4.33-34). Evidently the onstage

"audience cannot follow the play's linguistic content" (Erne, *Spanish Tragedy* 65), indicating

that Hieronimo's play does use different languages.

Furthermore, such a linguistic shift would be fully in keeping with the thematics of Kyd's play. From the opening scene of *The Spanish Tragedy*, the complex relationship between appearance and reality—and the difficulty in accurately deciphering the two—has been a consistent theme. On the Renaissance stage, with the paucity of realistic stage effects to clearly direct the audience, language was particularly essential for both setting a scene and providing strong indications of precisely what its contents might mean. While Hieronimo makes certain to provide the actors with accoutrements that fit the roles they play, he creates a "disjunction between the verbal and the visual [which] breeds further confusion. The English actor who plays Spanish Bel-Imperia plays Italian Perseda who speaks 'courtly French'" (Mazzio 216). Kyd's removal—or, more precisely, problematizing—of the verbal component of performance both underlines its theatricality and places even more emphasis on the audience's role in deciphering the events occurring on stage.

Even without this issue of a shift in language, the performance of *Soliman and Perseda* is particularly complex, its theatricality occurring on multiple levels, both within the world of *The Spanish Tragedy* and for the watching audience. For the on-stage audience of the Spanish King, the Portuguese Viceroy and their respective trains, it is simply a theatrical performance, as evidenced by the former's appreciative response moments after seeing an actual murder (Balthazar's) and a suicide (Bel-Imperia's) committed: "Well said, Old Marshal, this was bravely done" (4.4.68). For Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia, it is deadly serious, though even there we have divergence, since Bel-Imperia's suicide is not expected by Hieronimo. For Balthazar and Lorenzo, it begins as theatre and eventually, fatally, turns to reality. For Revenge, watching above, it is the expected culmination that he has confidently awaited. And for the Ghost and the watching audience in the theater, what the performance means depends completely on their

ability to decipher the multiple layers of performance that Kyd, through the revenger-playwright Hieronimo, has placed before their twin audiences. While the more discerning members of the theater audience presumably would realize precisely what is occurring, it is a safe assumption that many would be confused, caught between the overlapping layers of theatricality and reality. The audience's—or, perhaps more precisely, audiences'—uncertainty admittedly lasts for only a short time, since Hieronimo quickly switches to English and explains the scene on stage, but it is impossible to understate the sheer metatheatrical virtuosity of what he and Kyd have "fabulously counterfeit" (4.4.77).

Intriguingly, as Hieronimo quickly moves things towards the play's conclusion, he seemingly seeks to negate the fictionality of his position, stepping away from theatricality to emphasize the authenticity of his sorrow and his revenge:

> Haply you think, but bootless are your thoughts,
> That this is fabulously counterfeit,
> And that we do as all Tragedians do:
> To die today for fashioning our Scene,
> The death of Ajax or some Roman peer,
> And in a minute starting up again,
> Revive to please tomorrow's audience.
> No, Princes; know I am Hieronimo,
> The hopeless father of a hapless Son,
> Whose tongue is tuned to tell his latest tale,
> Not to excuse gross errors in the play.
> I see your looks urge instance of these words;
> Behold the reason urging me to this: [*Shows his dead son.*] (4.4.76-88)

Robert Watson is one among many critics who focus on the physical expression of death which Hieronimo brings forth here and views it as dramatically distinct from what preceded it, saying:

> Hieronimo drops his metadramatic role … And here he shows the unreviving body of Horatio, for which he has repaid these fathers in kind. By having Hieronimo negate the fictionality of his show in this way, Kyd removes one crucial level of detachment between his spectators and his play. Drama is not some academic historical exercise, the author-figure here reminds his audience; it is about real and present lives, and therefore about real and imminent deaths. (315)

While Watson is certainly accurate about the audience being reminded that drama is not "some

academic historical exercise," that is a message which *The Spanish Tragedy* has conveyed from

its opening moments. Paradoxically, the play's theatricality is so obvious that it hews closer to

reality than performances on the stages that would fill the history of English theatre from the

Restoration onwards. Early modern metatheatricality constantly reminded its audiences of the

intrinsic connection between the performances on stage and the performative nature of existence

in the *theatrum mundi*. In the case of *The Spanish Tragedy*, the omnipresent audience of Andrea

and Revenge has illustrated this connection throughout, in addition to the other metatheatrical

material appearing on the stage. Now, standing amidst his audience with no proscenium arch to

separate them, Hieronimo speaks both to and for his watchers, implicitly asking them to judge

him and his cause aright—not because his fictional reality is suddenly negated but because his

theatricality is clearly akin to that which fills the world his viewers inhabit. While Hieronimo

may have stepped out of the world of *Soliman and Perseda*, he hardly eschews *The Spanish

Tragedy*'s world of theatricality. The speech mentioned above continues for nearly eighty lines,

which begin and end by explicitly reiterating the position he has occupied for so long:

> Haply you think, but bootless are your thoughts,
> That this is fabulously counterfeit,
> …
> And, Princes, now behold Hieronimo,
> Author and actor in this Tragedy,
> Bearing his latest fortune in his fist;
> And will as resolute conclude his part
> As any of the Actors gone before
> And, Gentles, thus I end my play;
> Urge no more words, I have no more to say.
> [*He runs to hang himself.*] (4.4.76-77, 145-151)

Hieronimo, even when he most openly states the tortuous situation that is his reality, remains an "author and actor in this tragedy." The (meta)theatrical and tragic irony of the speech is palpable, and would especially have been so in a Renaissance theater.

The explicit (re)statement of Hieronimo as a performer does make certain changes to the manner in which he has embodied the position throughout the play. The first is that he lays bare the soul of his mystery and asks for the correct response from his audience. Hieronimo's performance, as Lorna Hutson notes:

> …links the investigative energy of the plot or narrative structure of the … drama to an emotional and intellectual appeal to the audience as lay judges, thus throwing the emphasis simultaneously on the audience's intellectual capacity to puzzle out what the plot presents as "evidence" and on its ethical arbitration of what that evidence implies … to our capacity as equitable moral arbiters of the case. (33)

There is an implicit distinction made by Hieronimo here between the on-stage and off-stage audience, since only the latter, having been privy to all of the staged events, is in a position to "judge him in the light of all the circumstances [and] … show compassion for the cause" (Altman 33). The distinction is accurate, since—despite Hieronimo's impassioned speech—there is a substantial divergence between the responses of the off-stage audience and the on-stage one (and, presumably, that of the Ghost and Revenge, in their liminal position on the borders of the stage). In a grimly amusing illustration of the problems of theatrical communication and the need for accurate judgment among spectators, the gathered members of the Spanish and Portuguese courts utterly fail to understand Hieronymo's detailed explanation.

His on-stage audience's inability to see what Hieronimo seeks to communicate also serves to forestall the second shift in his position as performer, the fact that as an actor he now seeks the final curtain—or, more precisely, exit, since no curtains existed to shroud the mysteries of acting and stage management from the Renaissance audience. Actors—on stage or in the

theatrum mundi—have only partial control over their fates, which is immediately underlined by Hieronimo's capture and interrogation by those whose sons he slew. But this only enables the last violent acts of the play, as Hieronimo bites out his tongue and (when given a knife to sharpen his pen and write a confession) stabs Lorenzo's father, the Duke of Castile, and then himself. This action of Hieronimo's and the metaphorical role of his pen have seen much commentary from critics. Jonathan Crewe, as noted earlier, argues that in this scene "Hieronymo, also reenacts the Senecan impulse to annihilate representation as such" (103). I would argue, rather, that Hieronimo's last action on stage only underlines the importance of performance and theatricality in *The Spanish Tragedy*. It is his pen, or rather his pretense of intending to sharpen it, which provides him with his final opportunity at vengeance, aided by his onstage audience's continuing inability to correctly decipher his performance. Hieronimo, as he has been from the outset of the play, remains both explicitly and implicitly an actor, and it is this position which has finally enabled his revenge. It cannot prevent his death, of course, but it allows him to choose the manner of his death (via suicide, slaying those whom he wishes to punish), or perform it as he wishes. Rather than annihilating representation, the closing scenes of *The Spanish Tragedy* only re-emphasize the power of theatricality.

Even after Hieronimo's death, the play's engagement with performance, spectatorship, and judgment does not end. Charles Whitney claims that the "murders and suicides of Bel-Imperia and Hieronymo in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* … shatter on-stage audiences with both grief and the realization of their own complicity in murder" (62), but that is only partly true. While the Spanish King and Portuguese Viceroy certainly express their deep sorrow, they write off what Hieronimo did as "such monstrous deeds" (4.4.202) and do not even mention Bel-Imperia. In fact, the lines and later stage directions seem to indicate that the bodies of Lorenzo,

Balthazar and the Duke of Castile are borne off, which leaves Hieronimo's, Bel-Imperia's and Horatio's corpses to litter the stage, forgotten and unmourned. In the world of *The Spanish Tragedy*, as in the theater where it is staged, eloquent speech and theatricality do not necessarily lead to the responses which one wishes from one's audience. There is, however, one spectator in (or bordering) the world of the play who has always known what will occur and been able to watch the play's proceedings with equanimity and understanding. That figure, Revenge, now descends to bring proceedings to a close. Just as Revenge and the Ghost had opened the play, they now provide the conclusion, with Revenge allowing the Ghost to assign all of the dead to particular roles in Hades, like actors being assigned roles in an endless play. Kyd does not risk the audience missing the metaphor, having Revenge say:

> Then haste we down to meet thy friends and foes:
> To place thy friends in ease, the rest in woes;
> For here though death hath end their misery,
> I'll there begin their endless Tragedy. (4.5.45-48)

Eschewing subtlety, Revenge's final words explicitly remind the audience, one last time, of the direct connection between drama and life which *The Spanish Tragedy* has dramatized.

Conclusion

Despite appearing relatively early in the history of Renaissance drama, *The Spanish Tragedy* is emblematic of the period's deployment of, and reliance on, metatheatricality as an intrinsic element of dramatic practice. The analysis in this chapter is far from exhaustive, only serving to indicate some of the particularly important uses of metatheater in Kyd's play. The use of classical sources like Seneca (as when Hieronimo "sprinkles his vengeance monologue with Senecan aphorisms" (Griswold 85)), references to English nationalism (in particular during the performances that Hieronimo arranges for the court), the use of texts and reading within the world of the play (such as Bel-Imperia's letter to Hieronimo implicating the murderers)—these

are only a few additional elements which display and contribute to the play's metatheatricality. James Calderwood, in his *Shakespearean Metadrama*, states that the general argument of his book is "that Shakespeare's plays are not only about the various moral, social, political, and other thematic issues with which critics have so long and quite properly been busy but also about Shakespeare's plays. Not just the 'idea of the play,' as in Anne Righter's fine book of that title, but dramatic art itself … is a dominant Shakespearean theme, perhaps its most abiding subject" (5). I would make a similar argument about the bulk of early modern drama. Kyd's play is a sustained exploration of the nature of Renaissance playing itself—the way it creates meaning, the manner in which it simultaneously contains elements of truth and falsehood, its complicated relationship with the world that surrounds it, and, above all, the vital role of the spectator in allowing it to exist and flourish. In this, it is neither unique nor aberrant in the history of early modern drama, but utterly emblematic of the concerns and methodology which one finds constantly at play on the Renaissance stage.

CHAPTER FOUR

PLAYING MONARCHS IN *HENRY V* AND

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

Shakespeare, like virtually all of his contemporary playwrights, continually utilized and further honed the metatheatrical techniques, tropes and subjects introduced and popularized on the early modern stage by predecessors such as Kyd. Each of his plays feature metatheatrical elements, the variations in their nature and application between individual dramas indicating precisely how versatile and effective a tool the metatheatrical mode was for skilled playwrights and actors during the Renaissance. Metatheater in Shakespeare's plays ranges from the most overt of appearances to the subtlest of implications, from simple referential in-jokes to complex treatments of the nature of playing and its relationship to the world within which it occurs. What remains common is that it always has an overarching aim, to facilitate the creation and performance of drama, safely and profitably, within the complex world of early modern London. Metatheater was especially, and vitally, helpful in one of the riskiest dramatic negotiations that Shakespeare had to make in navigating this world as a playwright—that of depicting monarchy on stage.

Censorship and attempts at government control of their enterprise, as noted in Chapter 2, were a basic reality for early modern playmakers, substantially mediating the production of Renaissance drama. As David Kastan notes, "scrutiny and regulation were among the defining characteristics of playmaking no less than were boy actors in the theater or casting off copy in the printing house" (*Shakespeare After Theory*, 104). The licensing pen of the Master of the Revels attempted (albeit with mixed success) to ensure that politically or religiously subversive

material did not appear on English stages. Most major Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights endured some form of legal questioning (and, in the case of some, prison and possible torture) regarding their work at some point. Queen Elizabeth, arguably even more than her predecessors and successors, wielded much of her power through a careful and theatrical manipulation of personal appearances and display before her subjects, so she was understandably wary about how she—and others that might be analogized to her—was represented in the popular theatre. Whether she actually compared herself to tales of Richard II or not, the comparison was hardly novel or surprising, as the role of the play in the Essex rebellion indicates.

Many of the Queen's subjects too were aware and unsympathetic of theatrical depictions of royalty. In 1603, Henry Crosse complained that in the theaters "there is no passion wherewith the king, the soueraigne maiestie of the Realme was possest, but is amplified, and openly sported with, and made a May-game to all the beholders" (Chambers 4.247). A few years later, Sir Henry Wotton criticized a performance of *All is True* (the contemporary title for Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, before the First Folio), saying that the play, "which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of Pomp and Majesty … [was] sufficient in truth within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous" (Logan Pearsall Smith 2.32). While such opinions and the existence of state censorship and control of dramatic production made the depiction of monarchy on stage a risky business, there were also strong inducements for attempting it. The history play (especially ones regarding British monarchs) was a highly popular genre, providing a strong pecuniary motive for early modern troupes to perform and playwrights to write them, especially since their competition in London was already doing so. The figure of the monarch on stage was also a particularly rich one for aesthetic and dramatic treatment, functioning as a specialized

version of the popular protagonist-as-actor figure and containing the sort of potentiality which

attracted playwrights such as Marlowe (in his *Edward II*) before Shakespeare.

Partly due to this complex context, Shakespeare's history plays have drawn dramatically

differing critical opinions regarding their subversive nature (or lack thereof), especially when it

comes to the figures of the monarchs he depicts. Critics as divergent as Tillyard and Greenblatt

have viewed his works (and Renaissance theatre in general) as utilized to support and serve state

authority. In contrast, David Kastan argues that even if that was the case, theatre was also

> …at least as effective as a subversion of that authority, functioning as a significant
> cultural intervention in a process of political reformation … on stage the king became a
> subject—the subject of the author's imaginings and the subject of the attention and
> judgment of an audience of subjects. If, then, English history plays recollected and
> rehearsed the past, they also prophesied the future [execution of Charles I], as they placed
> the king on a scaffold before a judging public. (*Shakespeare After Theory* 111).

In agreement with Kastan, I would add that early modern metatheater played a substantial role in

facilitating the appearance of such subversion on stage. Utilizing the metatheatrical mode

allowed potentially risky material and themes which could easily have been viewed as seditious

to appear comparatively far more innocuous. Shakespeare's mastery in this area is evidenced by

the fact that he is among the few major playwrights whose works appear never to have landed

him in any serious difficulty with the Crown, in contrast to writers such as Jonson, Nashe,

Chapman, and Marston.

While any of Shakespeare's chronicle histories would serve for an examination of his

metatheatrical treatment of monarchy on stage, my analysis will focus on *Henry V*, which

features arguably the most overt use of the mode among them. Its Chorus constantly emphasizes

and relies on the play's metatheatrical nature, reminding the audience time and again of their

presence at a play, the limitations of the stage, and the spectators' role in its functioning. What it

also does is set the stage for the play's subtly understated exploration of the negative potentiality

of Henry V as a conquering monarch. Henry and the Chorus have a complex relationship—strongly resembling each other in certain ways and diverging deeply in others—which plays a key role in the play's effect. As was true for many of his other plays, Shakespeare's deployment of metatheater in *Henry V* simultaneously enables the existence of a subversive undercurrent and veils it from being obvious, allowing the playwright to more safely ply his trade on the stage.

I shall also examine Shakespeare's use of the metatheatrical mode in a play that is not often considered in close conjunction with *Henry V—Antony and Cleopatra*. I contend, however, that the latter serves usefully in this regard. The variation in the use of metatheater in the two plays indicates how versatile a tool it was, allowing the same playwright to deploy it in different ways and in varied genres based on the desired ends. They also share certain vital characteristics. Both plays feature monarchs who are consummate actors and seem at first glance to present the conventional English view of their subjects—one a national military hero (Henry) and one a foreign queen who is seen as an exotic seductress (Cleopatra). The plays also speak, sometimes overtly and more often implicitly, of the material conditions under which they were created and performed. They both reference the nature of the physical stages on which they appeared; the components of the troupes which acted them; the repertoires of the companies and their audiences' experiences of seeing such plays; existing ideas and concerns about theatrical production; and the history of both English and European royalty.

In other ways, the plays are virtual mirrors of each other, presenting reversed images that help to cast the other in relief. *Henry V* explicitly proclaims its theatricality and the limitations of the material stage on which it occurs, but is silent about the fact that it presents a monarch who is an actor himself. In contrast, *Antony and Cleopatra* is silent about its theatricality, containing implicit indicators of the nature of the stage it occupies, but explicit about the performative

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nature of the rulers (especially Cleopatra) whom it focuses on. *Henry V* depicts an actor-king who controls the stage via powerful rhetoric and the appearance of consistency, successfully forcing his audiences to view him and their surrounding reality as he sees fit. *Antony and Cleopatra* features an actress-queen who displays her virtuosity as a performer and her mutability, but is surrounded by critical spectators who see her and her displays as they see fit. Between them, the two plays combine to serve as a strong illustration of the multifaceted role of metatheater in early modern dramaturgy, of the subversive potential of Renaissance theatre, and, especially, of the varied appearances and treatment of a specific version of the protagonist-as-player (namely the monarch as player) on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages.

HENRY V:

In performances of *Henry V*, its metatheatricality is evident from the very opening, due to the existence of the Chorus. Despite its popularity in Renaissance theatre (as outlined in Chapter 2), Shakespeare only utilizes a Chorus in a few cases (such as Time in *The Winter's Tale*). Certainly, he never uses it, qualitatively or quantitatively, to the same degree as in *Henry V*. The Chorus in *Henry V* not only opens and closes the play but appears multiple times within it, bridging the movement from one Act to the next. Admittedly, the latter element is somewhat of an editorial invention, later editors having decided that the presence of the Chorus should signal an Act break. Ironically, the artificiality of this decision only serves to indicate how the Chorus' appearances fit seamlessly into the unfolding of the play in performance, especially on the sort of stage where *Henry V* first appeared (where Act—and Scene—divisions functioned very differently than on most British stages post-1660). This constant, deep interlacing of the Chorus and the play's unfolding separates it from the Prologues and Epilogues which appear in some Shakespeare plays (such as the opening frame in *Taming of the Shrew* or the closing of *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream). The fact that the Chorus explicitly identifies itself as such, stepping

back from the play to comment on its events to a degree that individuals within it cannot, also

sets it apart from characters that have choric moments, such as Margaret in *Richard III*. The sole

possible comparison in Shakespeare's other works is with Gower in *Pericles*, who also appears

as both Prologue and Epilogue and bridges the movement between Acts. What sets the Chorus in

Henry V apart is the degree to which it explicitly emphasizes the theatrical nature of the spectacle

that the audience is seeing and, especially, their role in the functioning of the play (something

that is only mentioned in passing by Gower).

One of the Chorus' primary aims in *Henry V* is seemingly to make explicit dramatic

conventions (particularly those to do with metatheater and the interlinked roles of playwright,

performers and audience) that would presumably have been clear to virtually everyone in the

theater when the play was first performed. Shakespeare's choice to thus explicate precisely what

he is engaged in is intriguing, especially since he could arguably have done the same in any other

history play but rarely does so (and certainly not in the same manner). Before focusing further on

the Chorus, it is worth considering the genre of *Henry V*, which dramatically increases the

Chorus' effects and complexity. Of the three broad genres into which Heminges and Condell

divided Shakespeare's plays in the *First Folio*, the history play is most naturally prone to

metatheater, particularly the chronicle histories which habitually centered on the reigns of

historical British monarchs. In postulating that, in one sense, "*all* drama is metadramatic, since

its subject is always, willy-nilly, the drama/culture complex," Richard Hornby persuasively

argues that "a play operates within a system of drama as a whole, and, concentrically, also within

the systems that form culture as a whole" (31, 22). If that is the case, how much more necessarily

metadramatic must be a play that concerns itself with the specific historical moments from which

the culture of its current spectators directly derives? While plays such as *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Hamlet* might have made their original audiences mindful of connections between the drama in performance and the *theatrum mundi* beyond, they did so by concerted effort, by a presentation of dramatic material which contained the metaphorical connections which the audience would, hopefully, comprehend and decipher as needed. In contrast, chronicle history plays, such as those in Shakespeare's *Henriad* or earlier examples like Marlowe's *Edward II*, could not avoid making their audiences so mindful even if they wished to—since it was the very presentation of that *theatrum mundi* (or, to be precise, its historical roots) which they provided.

The metatheatrical potentiality of the chronicle history lies not only in the broader subject of English history but in some of the more specific elements that are ubiquitous in the genre, particularly the central figure of the monarch. As noted earlier (see Chapters 2 and 3), one of the more popular metatheatrical strategies in Renaissance drama is the usage of a protagonist who metaphorically represents the dramatist and/or actors themselves. The monarch, in position and function, perfectly fulfills both roles. In the *Henriad*, for example, obvious connections exist between Shakespeare, his pen ruling and controlling the dramatic world, and "all the kings, whose successes and failures in governing men and events reflect Shakespeare's in governing them" (Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* 16). A similar metaphorical relationship exists between the historical king and the actors playing the role of dramatized monarch, since "[t]o play the king is to play the actor, for the king must have many roles in his repertoire" (Calderwood, *Henriad* 170). Furthermore, as the political (and, after Henry VIII, religious) head of the English people, the figure of the monarch contained an intrinsically representative dimension which a chronicle history had to engage with. By definition, the ruler on stage represented all English subjects in the audience, in a manner that virtually no fictional character,

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however richly crafted or easy to identify with, could. Furthermore, what was inevitably present in any chronicle history was a relationship that was incredibly risky for a Renaissance dramatist to navigate, namely the connection between the dramatized ruler and the monarch currently occupying the throne.

Besides drawing on such generalized metatheatrical affinity in the chronicle play genre, Shakespeare's *Henry V* also contains features which significantly heighten these aspects. Not only does the play inevitably reference the corpus of cultural material and metaphors noted previously, but it also displays innumerable connections with earlier texts which had done so. A primary source is the "second edition of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* [*of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1587)], which resourced more surviving plays than any other book" published in England during the Renaissance (Wiggins 23). Almost equally important is Edward Hall, Shakespeare's *Henriad* arguably providing an extended theatrical reworking of the "narrative continuum of his major source, Hall's *Union of the two noble and illustre familieis of Lancastre & York*" (Grene 9). Admittedly, despite their popularity, such chronicles may have been unknown to some in Shakespeare's original audience. However, his spectators were virtually certain to be aware of the popular earlier plays on related subjects, such as the anonymous play *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth: Containing the Honourable Battel of Agin-court*, likely performed by Queen Elizabeth's Men at the Bull Inn (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 290) a decade before *Henry V* and featuring many episodes that the *Henriad* dramatizes. Even more certain a part of the audience's consciousness were the preceding three plays of the *Henriad—Richard II*, *1* and *2 Henry IV*—which appeared within the four years preceding *Henry V*'s first performance. The existence of this theatrical and cultural history is one of the primary reasons why a modern audience—or any audience after the Renaissance—can never experience *Henry V* with the same

perspective that Shakespeare's original audience would have. Metaphorically and directly, via both genre and content, by the specific nature of the stages it was performed on and even the physical locations they occupied in London, a performance of *Henry V* inevitably reminded its audiences that it was a dramatized and fictionalized rendition of the complex world that surrounded the theater within which it currently existed.

When one remains mindful of the nature of this framework within which the audience of *Henry V* would have operated, there arises an inevitable question—why does the Chorus even exist in the play? The first two plays of the tetralogy feature no such figure and the Induction of *2 Henry IV* (delivered by the character of Rumor) appears primarily to provide narrative details of the preceding events of *1 Henry* IV. The Chorus of *Henry V*, in contrast, says virtually nothing about what came before. About the play's subject, the opening Prologue says only that it will depict the "vasty fields of France" and the battle of Agincourt. Instead, what it focuses on is an expansive delineation of the inability of the performers to truly display what they will seek to and their absolute reliance on the audience's imagination. As numerous critics have noted, "*Henry V* is surely the most self-conscious, even the most apologetic, of Shakespeare's plays" (Calderwood, *Henriad* 174). Of course, this apology is at least somewhat ironic and a rhetorical ploy, no more genuine than Antony's claim during the funeral speech for Caesar that "I am no orator, as Brutus is; / But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man" (3.2.221-222), or Othello's many protestations of a lack of art in his words, delivered moments before he launches into the most eloquent of speeches. Similarly, Shakespeare's Prologue delivers a self-deprecating speech which, ironically, in its artifice and that which is to follow, prepares the audience to appreciate his art.

That, however, is hardly enough of a justification for six separate appearances by the Chorus, framing and interlaced through the entire play. Scholars have long sought for further explanations, providing creative and often contradictory answers to its presence. Calderwood, for example, contrasts the Chorus with *2 Henry IV*'s rumor:

> In the Induction to *2 Henry IV* Rumour announced himself as running up and down England sowing dissensions of understanding. In a play so prefaced, false expectations, ironic double meanings, and mistrust will afflict not merely the characters but the audience as well. But Rumour is succeeded in *Henry V* by the Chorus, whose name in itself implies musical unity and whose dramatic function is to secure unity of interpretation. We are told in unambiguous tones what to expect in this play and how to respond to it. As an English audience, we are told to identify with, to admire, and to yearn for the lost glories of Henry's reign. (*Henriad* 145)

The above argument is part of Calderwood's view of the *Henriad* as an extended metadramatic exploration of the nature and power of language, which begins with the rhetorical failures of Richard II, moves gradually upwards through the verbal skills that Prince Hal displays, and culminates in a total mastery of language displayed by Henry V after he ascends the throne. Such an opinion relies on a view of the Chorus as an unproblematized example of "the normal dramatic convention which assigns truth to choruses, prologues, and the like" (145). A similar view is adopted by Nicholas Grene, though diverging from Calderwood on the audience's supposed identification with the dramatized material:

> In this last of the series of history plays, the Chorus acts as a mediator between audience and stage quite unlike anything else in the earlier histories. The willing suspension of disbelief, which enabled audiences to live through the events of the reigns of Henry VI, Richard III, Richard II, Henry IV dramatized on stage, is replaced by a knowing commentator, orchestrating the action with a self-conscious mood-music, distancing spectators from the epic tableaux. (29)

Despite their differences, both critics view the Chorus as possessing a "very strong position of theatrical authority" (241). That, in my estimation, is a critical error, flying in the face of both the unreliability in the theatrical enterprise that the Chorus explicitly speaks to in the Prologue and

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the play's reliance on the active participation of the audience. The Chorus, through its seemingly

unnecessary apology, rhetorically places the onus for deciphering the meaning of *Henry V* on the

audience. This is not merely a version of the popular "modesty topos" (Grene 241), but is instead

a strategic preparation for the audience's impending discovery of a fact that one hardly expects

from a Chorus—that it lies.

In virtually all of its appearances, the Chorus misrepresents what the play is to depict,

often explicitly and sometimes by implication. In the Prologue, it bemoans the players' inability

to truly depict the battle of Agincourt and explains that they can, at best, work with the

audience's imagination to create the legendary battle:

> Or may we cram
> Within this wooden O the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt?
> O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
> Attest in little place a million;
> And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
> On your imaginary forces work. (12-18)

Later, in the prologue to Act 4, it again apologizes for the insufficiencies of what is to come and

asks for the aid of the spectators in creating the scene on stage:

> And so our scene must to the battle fly;
> Where--O for pity!--we shall much disgrace
> With four or five most vile and ragged foils,
> Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous,
> The name of Agincourt. Yet sit and see,
> Minding true things by what their mockeries be. (49-54)

However, despite these claims, at no point does Shakespeare actually seek to dramatize the

battle. The fascinating thing about the Chorus' apology is that it "apologizes for events it does

not even attempt to show … Agincourt, or its serious side, is never depicted at all." (Aaron 283).

Virtually all of the actual action of Agincourt occurs off-stage, with the only on-stage action

consisting of Pistol sparing the life of an anonymous French soldier in greedy hopes of a ransom.

In contrast, in *1 Henry IV*, with neither Chorus nor apology, Shakespeare depicts five individual duels and two on-stage deaths to represent the battle of Shrewsbury. In *1 Henry VI*, the quickly shifting battle scenes alternately transform the tiring house into the walls of a besieged city as seen by attackers outside or defenders inside as needed, showing how the stage could be "both flexible and visually specific" (Bevington 76). In view of such options and previous plays, why the playwright chooses not to depict genuine martial action in *Henry V*, a play purportedly focused on the most famous English victory in the wars against the French, has long been debated (and excused, in many creative ways, by critics).

I would postulate that the reason is the same that necessitates the existence of the Chorus. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare presents a twinned picture of monarchy, one that is both laudatory and, less obviously, ironically subversive. By explicitly exposing the play's theatricality and the theater's inability to depict what it purports to, while simultaneously emphasizing the role of audience perception, he both prepares his spectators to look past the surface of what is seemingly provided on stage (i.e. a seemingly uncritical picture of the "mirror of all Christian kings") and deflects any criticism that might arise away from his company's performance and towards the imagination of the audience viewing it. While this approach powerfully influences the aesthetic and theatrical effects of *Henry V*, it was arguably even more important in the potential protection it provided for a playwright writing within a system that was highly suspicious of the subversive political potential of theater. Two years after the first performance of *Henry V*, when the Lord Chamberlain's Men faced questions regarding the performances of *Richard II* commissioned by co-conspirators in Essex's abortive revolt, Shakespeare might have wished that he had a similar excuse to fall back on.

While one might debate the reasons, there is no denying that the Chorus continually states "in unambiguous tones what to expect in this play and how to respond to it" (Calderwood, *Henriad* 145). What is equally undeniable is the disjunction between its statements and what the stage displays, which, in turn, raises questions about the suitability of the stated responses that the Chorus seeks. The Prologue, for example, indicates that the play wishes to show "the warlike Harry, like himself, / Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels, / Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire / Crouch for employment" (5-8). The following scene, instead, features the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely plotting how to retain valuable church lands by overtly supporting Henry's claim to the throne of France, an exchange that calls into question the validity of the invasion that is to follow.

Similarly, the Chorus' next appearance, preceding Act 2, has it claiming confidently:

Now all the youth of England are on fire,
And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies:
Now thrive the armourers, and honour's thought
Reigns solely in the breast of every man. (1-4)

It follows by narrating how three Englishmen, "One, Richard Earl of Cambridge, and the second, / Henry Lord Scroop of Masham, and the third, / Sir Thomas Grey, knight, of Northumberland" (23-25) are prepared to betray Henry to the French. In order to display this event, the Chorus says it will shift the scene of the play, since "The king is set from London; and the scene / Is now transported, gentles, to Southampton; / There is the playhouse now, there must you sit" (34-36). Instead, however, the next scene opens on a London street, where Pistol and Nym fight over petty insults and a few coins, dramatically shifting the register of the play and undercutting the supposedly high-minded and patriotic enterprise that the Chorus promised. It should also be noted that what the Chorus promises has already been undercut by the events of the first Act and its own reference to the traitors, whose breasts apparently harbor something very different than

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"honour's thought." The Chorus, however, appears singularly unaware of any such variation between what it claims the play will display and what the stage actually does, a lack of awareness that ironically heightens the impact of such disjunction.

The Chorus' presence and its metatheatrical misrepresentation of the content of *Henry V* achieve additionally subversive effects because of the relationship between its voice and that of the play's protagonist. While it is a commonplace in criticism of the play that Henry is an actor, comparatively less common "is the recognition that the special actor, Shakespeare's Chorus, is like the King" (Danson 30). Of all the characters in the play, the Chorus' rhetoric and diction most closely match Henry's, while the latter's unilateral depiction of, and calls to, English patriotism mimic that of the former. Metaphorically as well, the Chorus' unifying voice, introducing the events that are to follow and seemingly influencing audience responses to them, reflects that of the monarch, whose voice links and guides the kingdom and its inhabitants. That relationship is doubly true in the case of Henry V, the consummate playmaker, his rhetorical power capable of not just affecting the events that occur on stage but reframing the meaning of such occurrences—past, present or future—to dramatically influence how they are perceived by his onstage audience, whether they be his allies or foes. Despite the proliferation of playmaker-protagonists in the Shakespearean canon, there are virtually none who achieve the same control of the stage as Henry does. Perhaps Prospero and his magical abilities come close, but the resistance of Caliban and the uncertainty over Sebastian's and Antonio's repentance raise questions about his control. Furthermore, at the end of *The Tempest*, it is his position as magical playmaker that Prospero explicitly forsakes in order to resume his old position of Duke of Milan. In contrast, Henry ends his play even more firmly established as both ruler and playmaker than at the play's opening, his word now law to both England and France. It is the Chorus, seemingly

unwittingly, which helps to underline the subtle fissures between the appearance and the reality

of Henry's words and deeds, an act which is both facilitated and heightened in effect by the

strong relationship between Chorus and ruler.

While critics such as Danson are correct about the important similarities between Henry

and the Chorus, I contend that there are some equally vital differences between the two. The

Chorus consistently misinterprets events that are to follow in his addresses to the audience in the

theater, while Henry more commonly misinterprets (or, more precisely, reinterprets to his own

benefit) the past for the stage audience. The Chorus also seems utterly unaware of the disjunction

between what it claims and what occurs, whereas Henry appears more actively aware of the

variation between his claims and the reality. I say 'appears,' because Henry never actually

verbalizes such awareness. Among Shakespeare's player/playmaker-protagonists, Henry has one

of the lowest volumes of soliloquy, with only one section of fifty-odd lines after his interaction

with Williams and Bates followed by less than twenty lines of his prayer to the "God of battles"

(4.1.282) counting as such. Henry, in keeping with his eloquence and ability to sway his hearers,

is an almost purely public persona. He very rarely speaks to himself, a fact that makes his true

character—and Shakespeare's problematizing of it—ambiguous, lending complexity to the

portrayal and greater safety to the playwright. Is Henry a Machiavellian manipulator? Is he a

good-hearted champion of the English people? Or, even more interestingly, is he the former but

views himself as the latter? Different critics have varied answers to such questions. Kastan, for

example, sees Henry as a self-deluding idealist whose "uncritical moral intelligence forges the

unambiguous moral environment that heroic action demands" (*Shapes of Time*, 73). I would

argue that the play intentionally leaves us with no certain answer. The Chorus certainly views

Henry as the great savior of the English, but its other clearly flawed pronouncements bring the accuracy of the judgment into question.

What is less open to debate is the power of Henry's performative skill and rhetorical power. While any king must possess protean ability, Henry displays it to an exceptional degree, being able to transform himself for the purposes of any audience and circumstance. Even more importantly, both for his effectiveness as ruler and his potentially troubling nature, he is capable of reworking the reality that surrounds him and his audience, dramatizing it (and, as the anti-theatricalists argued actors do, sometimes simply lying) in a manner that inevitably persuades his audiences of his veracity and rightness. Similarly, like the best of playwrights, he controls and rhetorically depicts the stage that he bestrides so that all those who share it with him must necessarily assume the positions that he assigns them. It is not coincidental that most of the other Shakespearean characters who will display such skill and control are either his greatest villains (Iago, Edmund, Aaron) or at least highly ambiguous in their nature (Hamlet, Antony in *Julius Caesar*). Notably, the one other character from the chronicle histories who arguably aspires to such ability is the Machiavellian Richard III. Among all of them, however, Henry stands alone in that his performances virtually always achieve the fruition that he seeks.

Henry V is full of scenes of such rhetorical power and performative ability. In the play's second scene, at his first appearance, Henry rhetorically justifies his claim to the lands of France and the rightness of his invasion in a manner that leaves even the French envoys speechless in response. In 2.2, he persuades the very traitors who sought to kill him that they are guilty and deserve death. In 3.1, he famously persuades his retreating soldiers at Harfleur to leap "[o]nce more unto the breach" (1), before verbally persuading the Governor of the town to surrender two scenes later, Henry's words having more success than his cannons do. In 4.3, at Agincourt, he

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persuades his tattered army exactly how lucky they are to face overwhelming odds and gain

certain immortality on Saint Crispin's Day. In 5.2, near the play's closing, he presents himself as

an awkward lover wooing the reluctant, if somewhat resigned, French princess Catherine.

In these, and other, scenes, Henry's speeches and rhetorical strategy display a distinct

parallelism with the words and rhetorical techniques of the Chorus. Just as the Chorus does,

Henry invariably lays the onus on his audience and their judgment, arguing that what will occur

depends utterly on their choices and not his actions. Shortly after entering the stage, Henry asks

Canterbury for his opinion on the king's claim to France:

> Sure, we thank you.
> My learned lord, we pray you to proceed
> And justly and religiously unfold
> Why the law Salique that they have in France
> Or should, or should not, bar us in our claim:
> And God forbid, my dear and faithful lord,
> That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading,
> Or nicely charge your understanding soul
> With opening titles miscreate, whose right
> Suits not in native colours with the truth;
> For God doth know how many now in health
> Shall drop their blood in approbation
> Of what your reverence shall incite us to.
> Therefore take heed how you impawn our person,
> How you awake our sleeping sword of war:
> We charge you, in the name of God, take heed (1.2.8-23)

In a display of brilliant wordplay, particularly his pronoun usage, Henry shifts all responsibility

for the invasion—one that will be led by and intended to obtain French land and riches for him—

to Canterbury. It is apparently the opinion of Canterbury that will be to blame for awaking the

"sleeping sword of war," not the hand of the king that will wield it.

Nor does his verbal dexterity stop there. Only minutes later, once the French ambassador

has delivered the Dauphin's mocking message and gift, Henry delivers one of the most

memorable speeches in all of Shakespeare's history plays, rhetorically converting the tennis balls

sent by the Dauphin into the English cannons of the invasion:

> And tell the pleasant prince this mock of his
> Hath turn'd his balls to gun-stones; and his soul
> Shall stand sore charged for the wasteful vengeance
> That shall fly with them: for many a thousand widows
> Shall this his mock mock out of their dear husbands;
> Mock mothers from their sons, mock castles down;
> And some are yet ungotten and unborn
> That shall have cause to curse the Dauphin's scorn. (282-289)

Amazingly, all blame for the English invasion and the French deaths that will follow alights now

on the shoulders of the Dauphin, with Henry himself somehow bearing utterly no responsibility.

He will replicate this behavior on multiple occasions, sometimes much more troublingly. On the

field of Agincourt, in his response to the "murders of the English baggage boys, Hal reiterates

decisions which he has already made as if [the] specific [occurrence] prompted his wrathful

orders to execute all French prisoners… Hal creates a better story and seizes the opportunity for

powerful rhetoric" (Osborne 355). The rhetorical skill and protean ability displayed by Henry is

as fascinating as it is characteristic of his depiction throughout the play. It is this quality which

makes *Henry V* one of Shakespeare's most protracted explorations of the power and potential

danger of performative ability, its effect subtly and ironically heightened by the fact that it is

through a dramatic performance on stage that the exploration occurs.

      While Henry's theatrical ability is impressive, the play does constantly, if subtly, present

certain concerns about the validity of his choices, primarily by emphasizing exactly how much of

an actor or playmaker he is.

> [T]he play both mimics and to some degree undoes Henry's role as choreographer of the
> national memory. Just as Henry is anxious to mask the fault lines in the appearance of
> national unity which run throughout the play, so the play as a whole both hides and—
> largely by making visible the process of hiding—reveals the stress points in the sense of

nationhood to which the increasingly militaristic and imperial England of the 1590s was
aspiring. (Baldo 134)

Differing from Quintilian, Shakespeare reveals the art that lies behind his dramatic creation and,
in doing so, lays bare the art that similarly lies in Henry's words. As noted previously, Henry's
connection with, and unilateral praise by, the unreliable Chorus is a key element of this strategy.
Beyond the Chorus, however, there are always additional, if faint (to use Baldo's phrase) fault
lines in Henry's performances which reveal disjunctions between word and deed. In keeping
with the play's constantly metatheatrical bent, the fissures are usually revealed via an emphasis
on the dramatically powerful nature of the performances which seek to hide them. For example,
Henry's speech to the Governor of Harfleur is brilliantly eloquent and terrifyingly vivid in its
description of what might occur if the invading force breaches their defenses:

> …in a moment look to see
> The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
> Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
> Your fathers taken by the silver beards,
> And their most reverend heads dash'd to the walls,
> Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,
> Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
> Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
> At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen. (3.3.33-41)

It is the very power of the speech and the images it conjures that make it difficult to buy into the
rhetorical argument Henry seeks to make, that all blame for such results falls upon the defenders,
not he and his soldiers. He says, with customarily persuasive power, to the Governor that "you
yourselves are cause" if the people of Harfleur choose to, "guilty in defense, be thus destroyed"
(19, 43). Even those who argue that Shakespeare's Henry is an unvarnishedly positive portrait of
an English hero struggle to reconcile that view with the Machiavellian power of a man who
accuses those he threatens with death and rape of being solely at fault if such events occur.

As he does at Harfleur, a strategy Shakespeare commonly uses in the play is to depict the effectiveness of Henry's acting ability and rhetorical power to such a hyperbolic degree that it draws additional attention to what the process entails. Henry's adroit handling of the traitorous trio at Southampton, setting the scene like a master dramatist so that their own words will remove the option for clemency, is masterly enough. What renders it overly—and, in my estimation, intentionally—hyperbolic is the manner in which his eloquent castigation of the traitors actually causes them to thank God and Henry himself for having captured them:

> GREY: Never did faithful subject more rejoice
> At the discovery of most dangerous treason
> Than I do at this hour joy o'er myself.
> Prevented from a damned enterprise:
> My fault, but not my body, pardon, sovereign. (2.2.161-165)

While the traitors' overblown repentance makes the staged nature of the scene more evident, it also sets Henry's following words in relief. As usual, the king removes all responsibility from himself, sentencing the three men to death as if he were reluctantly compelled to do so only by the laws of England:

> Touching our person seek we no revenge;
> But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,
> Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws
> We do deliver you. Get you therefore hence,
> Poor miserable wretches, to your death:
> The taste whereof, God of his mercy give
> You patience to endure, and true repentance
> Of all your dear offences! (2.2.174-181)

The sheer virtuosity and dramatically unbelievable nature of the performance and rhetoric rip away the veil that Henry seeks to place over it, a fact that is more obvious to an audience primed to such awareness by the insistent metatheatricality of the Chorus and the manner in which Henry has already displayed such virtuosity.

Similarly, after the climactic battle of Agincourt, the "astonishing kill ratio announced by the English after their victory—dramatically italicized as Henry reads the casualty accounts separately" (Hendrick 471) simultaneously aggrandizes the victory and renders it fantastical. While Holinshed did cite "this fantastically low English figure" of twenty-eight dead, even he noted that other reliable writers claimed that over five or six hundred English were slain, but Shakespeare "silently hyperbolizes, using what he knows to be less reliable numbers" (472). The resultant effect is exacerbated by the manner in which Henry explicitly interprets and presents the numbers. He first states that "O God, thy arm was here! / And not to us, but to thy arm alone, / Ascribe we all" (4.8.104-106). Here, in the moment of overt piety, he implies that "God fought as well for the true English King" and "reinterprets the event as evidence of sacred sanction" (Osborne 355). Furthermore, in reading out the names in order of status and dismissing those below the rank of squire as "None else of name" (4.8.103), Henry explicitly works against the words of his great performance before the battle, the Saint Crispin's Day speech, where he democratically described his army as "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" (4.3.61). Despite his earlier claims that "he to-day that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile, / This day shall gentle his condition" (4.3.62-64), the promise is now forgotten. All who died fighting for Henry returned to their proper place in the social hierarchy, most of them rendered utterly nameless. One of the issues for a theatrical performer, particularly one who seeks to present a sense of verisimilitude to their audience, is that contexts and audiences change, requiring protean adaptability to cater to them all. Henry certainly possesses such capability, but the stage audience is able to see the shifts and movements that he makes, which reveals that what he does is an art, as fictive as it is profitable for his nation.

In the world of the play, there are almost no audience-members to see Henry in multiple roles, so such glimpses behind the veil exist primarily for the theater audience. Tellingly, the one person in the play who explicitly encounters Henry in multiple roles is the one that he is least successful in persuading. Before the battle of Agincourt, Henry passes among his soldiers in disguise, an act that the Chorus enthusiastically describes as one of royal largesse:

> For forth he goes and visits all his host.
> Bids them good morrow with a modest smile
> And calls them brothers, friends and countrymen.
> Upon his royal face there is no note
> How dread an army hath enrounded him;
> Nor doth he dedicate one jot of colour
> Unto the weary and all-watched night,
> But freshly looks and over-bears attaint
> With cheerful semblance and sweet majesty;
> That every wretch, pining and pale before,
> Beholding him, plucks comfort from his looks:
> A largess universal like the sun
> His liberal eye doth give to every one,
> Thawing cold fear, that mean and gentle all,
> Behold, as may unworthiness define,
> A little touch of Harry in the night. (Prologue 4.32-47)

As usual, the Chorus is completely and unequivocally wrong. Henry, as shown on stage, goes forth in disguise to test the opinions of his followers about him and the impending battle. He begins with a first cheery and then slightly prickly exchange with his old drinking buddy Pistol, while pretending to be another soldier (the punningly named Harry Le Roy). Though the exchange once more underlines Henry's acting ability, it "is simply not the same as cheering your men by moving among them as their king who is confident of victory and communicates his feeling to his troops," as the Chorus claims he does (Williamson 276). Next, when he overhears Gower and Fluellen talking, he passes on without addressing them at all. Then comes the longest interaction between Henry and the commoners in his army in both this scene and the play as a whole—the disguised king's exchange with the soldiers John Bates, Alexander Court and

Michael Williams, who are debating the rightness of the king's invasion and the moral effects of the deaths that will occur for him tomorrow.

The disguised Henry, in a surprisingly unsubtle manner, dramatically defends the king, both in his aims and as an individual. While Court has no lines after his entrance and Bates says that he is willing to "fight lustily for him" (4.1.185), Williams is not so easily persuaded. In fact, the exchange "with Williams ends in a quarrel that is renewed after the battle, when Henry makes this sympathetic figure the butt of his joke" (Lane 30). Not only does Henry's interaction with the soldiers give the Chorus' words the lie, but it helps to provide an additional subversive frame to the battle. Before Agincourt, Henry fails to inspire and persuade his troops as he wishes and, after the battle, the subtle "soiling of Henry's triumph persists with the presence of the bitter Williams on stage throughout the body count that certifies the English victory" (30). Of course, we have no records for Williams' behavior on stage during the reading of the names and Henry's glossing over the "None else of name" who died for his cause, but one may certainly argue that his presence is enough. While it may be too small a mote to genuinely trouble the royal eye, or even the eyes of the audience that watch the performance of *Henry V*, Williams' presence underlines some of the problems of Henry's theatricality. As an actor, Henry transforms himself, sometimes physically and more often rhetorically, so as to manipulate and persuade his audiences. Yet, in this one small instance, we see someone that is not so easily beguiled by his words, notably someone who gets to see Henry switch between multiple guises. In view of the Chorus' constant reiterations of the audience's power, this is a subtle indicator that perhaps Henry's audience—both on-stage and off—should look more deeply beneath the façade his words erect.

A further reason for the likelihood that Shakespeare's audiences were to look beneath the surface of Henry's words is the play's existence as the last of a quartet. Many in the audience would have seen some, if not all, of the preceding plays of the *Henriad*. While *Henry V* contains both explicit and implicit references to all three earlier dramas, the most influential link with regard to the issue of Henry V as an actor is to *1 Henry IV*. As occurs in *Henry V*, the earlier play provides little explicit indication of Prince Hal's inner thoughts, with only a single true soliloquy. That one speech, however, is crucial to the subject of playing and monarchy, since Hal reveals that his presence in the tavern is an extended and strategic act, designed to "falsify men's hopes" and ensure that "he may be more wondered at" when he chooses to achieve his "reformation" (1.2.201, 191, 203). Occurring at the end of only the second Scene of the play, Hal's soliloquy casts all of his future speeches and actions in an ambiguous light, impelling the audience to always wonder if his words and deeds are genuine or carefully crafted performances. The fact that he achieves all that he wishes by the play's end also serves to underline precisely how effective his roleplaying is and serves as a precursor to his continuing successes in *2 Henry IV* and, especially, *Henry V*.

Hal's statement about his personal use of roleplaying intersects with other elements of *1 Henry IV* to indicate the role of performance in statecraft, in particular through the current king, his father. While bemoaning his son's behavior and reputation, Henry IV describes the difference between his own past displays to the public (as the rebel Henry Bolingbroke) and that of Richard II, whom he overthrew, analogizing the latter to Hal (3.2.29-91). Hal's laconic response, "I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord, / Be more myself" (3.2.92-93) is particularly ironic here, in view of the fact that he has been carefully crafting what he "himself" is or will become—or appear to become. Being well aware—and very much in control—of the role of theatrical

presentation in the functioning of monarchy, Hal knows that roleplaying is, as Greenblatt says, "one of power's essential modes" (46). A very different, if no less telling, expression of the connection between acting and royalty occurs in the climactic battle at Shrewsbury, where Henry IV sends forth many nobles "Semblably furnished like the King himself" (5.3.21). Douglas, having slain many of these "shadows," eventually meets the true king and thinks he is simply "another counterfeit" (5.4.29, 34). The implications of this exchange are, as Kastan puts it, that "kingship itself is always and only a counterfeit, a role, an action that a man might play" (Introduction 64). Royal power in the political world that the *Henriad* dramatizes (and in the one it was composed and performed within) is intrinsically tied to performance and playacting.

The references to the earlier plays in *Henry V* could, thus, furnish a metatheatrical reminder to the audience that a younger Henry had displayed his ability to act and perform as best benefited him, providing one more indication that his words and deeds as the king might require some scrutiny. The indication, as previously noted, is subtle, presumably for the aforementioned reasons of aesthetics and to ensure safety from censorship and accusations of political heresy. A more explicit reference may be found at the very end of the play to the earlier tetralogy of Shakespeare's earlier sequences of history plays (*1, 2* and *3 Henry VI*, and *Richard III*). At this moment, Henry stands utterly victorious, having beaten the French into submission and gained both the hand of Catherine and the lands he desired. As the play concludes, he has achieved all of the greatness that the Chorus has consistently praised him for. Yet, at this moment of utter triumph, in a stunning change of register, the hitherto utterly positive Chorus provides a closing sonnet that dramatically undercuts everything that has gone before it:

> Thus far, with rough and all-unable pen,
> Our bending author hath pursued the story,
> In little room confining mighty men,
> Mangling by starts the full course of their glory.

Small time, but in that small most greatly lived
This star of England: Fortune made his sword;
By which the world's best garden be achieved,
And of it left his son imperial lord.
Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crown'd King
Of France and England, did this king succeed;
Whose state so many had the managing,
That they lost France and made his England bleed:
Which oft our stage hath shown; and, for their sake,
In your fair minds let this acceptance take. (Epilogue. 1-14)

In keeping with its previous appearances, the Epilogue begins with a self-deprecating apology

for its author's failings. Similarly typical is the divergence between the apparent aim of its words

and their actual effect. Overtly, all the Chorus seeks to do here is state how brilliant Henry was

by emphasizing how "This star of England" flashed across the sky of English history like a

comet. Yet its words explicitly remind the audience of the temporally and politically limited

nature of Henry's victories, his early death "leaving Henry VI to lose all of the three crowns to

which he was born" (Dutton, *Henry V* 37). This reminder has especial force for the play's

original audiences in that it is metatheatrically supported by their memories of having seen

Shakespeare's own vivid depiction, across multiple plays, of the disastrous reign of Henry VI

that is to follow.

As many critics have stated, the Epilogue "undermines our sense of the strain and

heroism implicit in what have been depicted as strenuous acts of memorializing and re-

presentation (just as the play can undermine the sense of heroic effort in its depiction of

Agincourt)" (Baldo 143). Less commonly noted is the fact that this effect is ironically achieved

via an act of "memorializing and representation" which is a subtle replication of what Henry has

done throughout the play—a reworking of the past by rephrasing and representing it to suit his

purposes. Here Shakespeare, controlling the theater and manipulating his audience in the manner

that Henry has metatheatrically mimicked on-stage, subtly implies a sense, "several times hinted

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at in the play, of national memory as the product of cunning and artful manipulation practiced by monarchs, conquerors, and colonizers against dissidents, the vanquished, and the colonized" (143). And he does so while overtly proclaiming through the Chorus, just as Henry has, that his aims are utterly transparent and that all power in the dramatic interchange lies in the hands of the audience.

From beginning to end of *Henry V*, while stating that he and his company seek to present a singularly patriotic vision of the glories of Henry's reign, Shakespeare simultaneously presents a subtly subversive version of the story, one that exists concurrently with the official tale and lurks constantly beneath the surface. By continually reminding the audience of the theatrical illusion, their imaginative power and his reliance on them to create the meaning of what is portrayed, the playwright impels them to look beneath the apparent veneer, while absolving himself and his compatriots of all responsibility for what they might discover. While doing so, in a feat of dramaturgy which is particularly impressive in its simultaneous deployment and exploration of metatheater, Shakespeare also achieves an exploration of the powers and potential danger of theatricality, especially in the monarch. Paradoxically, by displaying the skills of his protagonist (and, by extension, himself) as actor and playmaker, Shakespeare presents a detailed disquisition on the dangers of theatrical ability when deployed before an unthinking audience and the degree of power which it lends the consummate performer.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA:

As noted earlier, it can be instructive to study *Antony and Cleopatra* in conjunction with *Henry V* when considering the use of metatheater in the plays, in particular the varied possible treatments of the figure of the monarch as actor. *Henry V* presents a subtle exploration of the dangers of theatrical ability, particularly the dangerous influence which it gives a skilled actor

over an uncritical and credulous audience. *Antony and Cleopatra* similarly deals with the dangers inherent in performance, but reverses the direction of movement, instead displaying the power which the audience (especially a hostile or critical one) possesses over the performing actor, however skilled the latter might be. Where *Henry V* depicts the potentially damaging power of protean ability and the skill to transform oneself to meet every situation, *Antony and Cleopatra* explores how such expertise may be viewed by critical viewers as an example of duplicity and a lack of authenticity. Depicting historical characters that have an iconic stature as representatives of their individual nations and, by extension, the average members of society that the monarch represents, both plays provide an exploration of the role of theatricality and playing in the *theatrum mundi* beyond the stage.

Each play also contains an ironic and subversive subtext, undercutting the apparent surface subject and position. *Henry V*, seemingly a unilaterally patriotic treatment of the power and the glory of the English monarch as consummate performer, nevertheless raises troubling questions about the virtues of such ability and ends with an explicit reminder of the potential transience of the political actor. *Antony and Cleopatra*, apparently depicting the corruptive influence of an exotic Eastern siren and her inevitable fall before the staunchness of Roman virtue, undercuts the sense of Roman rectitude and concludes with a paean to the transcendent beauty and glory of the theatricality she displays. Though seemingly mismatched, the two plays combine to perform a wide-ranging and elaborate exploration of the beauty and the pitfalls of theatricality, for both the actor that performs and the audience that views the performance. In keeping with the near omnipresent reflexivity of the early modern stage, they present these themes via self-consciously theatrical performances, exploring and ironically questioning the very enterprise they are engaged in.

The framing of *Antony and Cleopatra* presents an example of the play's aforementioned relationship to the strategies deployed in *Henry V*. The latter play has arguably the most overt metatheatrical frame in all of Shakespeare's plays, with the Chorus bookending the drama and providing connective threads between the Acts which continuously emphasize the theatricality of the performance and, especially, the role of the audience. In contrast, *Antony and Cleopatra* provides no such metatheatrical frame, especially since it contains no choric figure that stands outside the dramatized world of the play. Instead, the inhabitants of the fictionalized world on stage constantly, if subtly, reference and emphasize their theatricality themselves (which virtually nobody does in *Henry V*).

Even the presentation of the world in *Antony and Cleopatra* quickly, if implicitly, indicates its fictionalized nature to the audience. Not only does it feature the highest number of scenes (forty-four) in any Shakespeare play, but it constantly shifts among various physical locations, in the manner bemoaned by Sidney in *The Defense of Poesy*. Such dramatic movements require constant imaginative awareness on the audience's part, and the need is emphasized in *Antony and Cleopatra* due to the rapidity and size of the movements (spanning the eastern half of the Mediterranean and beyond). The third Act, for example (immediately following a scene set in Misenum, off Italy's western coast), begins at an unspecified Middle Eastern location near Parthia and then shifts through Rome, Cleopatra's palace in Alexandria, Athens, Rome again, Actium on the western coast of Greece, either Egypt or somewhere near Actium, Caesar's camp in Egypt, and Cleopatra's palace to end the Act. The dizzying effect is exacerbated by the fact that many locations are not clearly identified, especially on the relatively property-less Jacobean stages where *Antony and Cleopatra* first appeared. The resultant effect, an emphasis on the play's fictionality, is underlined by the attempts of many later productions to

avoid it by deemphasizing the geographical shifts. John Dryden, imitating and reworking the play three-quarters of a century later in his *All for Love* (1678), placed every scene in Alexandria. Such an approach arguably made sense in the verisimilitude-seeking performances on the Restoration's proscenium stages, but is clearly not sought by Shakespeare's original.

The meaning of the geographical movements in *Antony and Cleopatra* are made clearer by the aforementioned references to performance by the play's characters. In *Henry V*, despite the protagonist's theatricality, nobody (not even the Chorus) discusses Henry as a performer. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, however, there are innumerable references by characters to themselves and others as actors. The bulk of them apply to Cleopatra herself, who is by far the preeminent performer of the play, not only in the sheer volume of her lines and how they dominate the speech of most others (such as when she cuts off even the dying Antony multiple times) but in her explicit emphasis on performance as a state of being. Part of the emphasis on performance might arise inherently from the multiple positions she fulfills and represents in the play, serving "simultaneously as a symbol of woman, of female sovereignty, of racial difference, and of subjected nationhood" (Callaghan 7). Yet Cleopatra evinces and revels in performance to a degree which far surpasses whatever is required of her as Queen of Egypt and consort to Antony. Her entire existence appears to be "an unwearying series of improvisings and self-mutations" (Barish 129). She continually shifts deftly through various roles and positions as suits her, to a degree which both enthralls those around her and, often, leaves them uncertain and critical of the mercurial queen.

Cleopatra's playing is so pervasive and influential in the play that it draws others into similar actions. Antony, of course, is one of the most susceptible, playing Mars to her Isis. It is clear, however, that it is not the Roman general who chooses what roles he is to play so much as

Cleopatra does. She laughingly recalls how, when he caroused with her, "Ere the ninth hour, I

drunk him to his bed; / Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst / I wore his sword

Philippan" (2.5.21-23). Here, Cleopatra draws Antony into cross-dressing, portraying the pair as

she sees fit and exchanging gender positions with him (an act that has particular meaning on a

stage where Cleopatra is played by a boy, as we see emphasized later). When he chooses to leave

Egypt to temporarily return to Rome after the death of his first wife, Fulvia, she temporarily

bemoans the choice and then berates him for not mourning Fulvia, informing Antony how he

should best perform at this moment:

> I prithee, turn aside and weep for her,
> Then bid adieu to me, and say the tears
> Belong to Egypt: good now, play one scene
> Of excellent dissembling; and let it look
> Like perfect honour. (1.3.76-79)

Such moments fill the play, where Cleopatra functions as actor and stage manager alike. Even in

her moments of casual relaxation with her beloved attendants, she regularly references playing

and performance. Shortly before she mentions the donning of Antony's sword, she jokes with

Mardian about playing billiards (punningly switching the meaning to playing on the stage

midway through the dialogue):

> CLEOPATRA. As well a woman with an eunuch play'd
> As with a woman. Come, you'll play with me, sir?
> MARDIAN. As well as I can, madam.
> CLEOPATRA. And when good will is show'd, though't come too short,
> The actor may plead pardon. (2.5.5-9)

These, of course, are moments of seeming unimportance in comparison to the more serious

events of the play. However, the constant emphasis on playing and performance in even the most

seemingly innocuous of scenes only underlines the centrality of the theme to the play, laying the

groundwork for the subject to take center-stage in the climactic moments of *Antony and Cleopatra.*

Cleopatra's overt self-presentation as performer and her perception as such by virtually all who interact with her stands in sharp contrast to Henry's usage of performance, which is virtually never commented on within the theatrical world of *Henry V.* Similarly, the near universal success of Henry's performances is diametrically different to the manner in which Cleopatra's theatrics are viewed. Unlike in *Henry V*, Shakespeare peoples the stage of *Antony and Cleopatra* with critical spectators, many of whom view Cleopatra's performances with a jaundiced eye. While eschewing the overt metatheatrical frame that *Henry V*'s Chorus provides, Shakespeare here more subtly presents the role of spectatorship in performance by deploying a series of (meta)theatrical audience-members.

The first of these, Antony's follower Philo, delivers the opening lines of the play, taking up a position near the audience and describing to his ally Demetrius what they (and the theater audience) are about to see:

> Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eyes,
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn,
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front: his captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gipsy's lust.
>
> *Flourish. Enter ANTONY, CLEOPATRA, her Ladies, the Train, with Eunuchs fanning her.*
>
> Look, where they come:
> Take but good note, and you shall see in him.
> The triple pillar of the world transform'd
> Into a strumpet's fool: behold and see. (1.1.1-14)

Philo's "behold and see," bolstered by his likely positioning in close proximity to the audience, is an implicit injunction to those watching the play in the theater. With the audience positioned all around the Renaissance stage, the physical positioning of the actor would have made the speech function effectively as an aside, drawing them into his confidence. These opening words play a significant role in coloring spectator perception of Antony and Cleopatra, presenting a negative viewpoint that is dramatically different to that sought by the two lovers. On a larger, thematic front, it displays what the play presents as key elements in the nature of theatricality— its reliance on the understanding of the spectator, as well as its potential for being misunderstood and misrepresented, particularly by those who lack sympathy and appreciation for the beauty and value of performance.

Writing in a period where theatre was a contentious subject and the playhouse a highly contested space, Shakespeare seemingly begins his play by introducing views that are inherently anti-theatrical and which retain significant force throughout the play, arguably even winning out in the end. To make a somewhat simplistic distinction, theatricality here is split along national lines, with Egypt (via Cleopatra) embracing performance and Rome (through Octavius) rejecting it. Antony, of course, falls squarely into Cleopatra's camp. Since he is depicting a foreign and historically distant international conflict, Shakespeare's subject here was not as risky as in *Henry V*, but it does still have certain links to contemporary morality and political ideals. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, "Shakespeare juxtaposes a rational and right-conquering Rome, embodied in the character of Octavian, against not only the luxurious and eastern colonial territory of Egypt, embodied in the despotic figure of Cleopatra, but also against the figure of Marc Antony, who succumbs to the dangers of 'going native' rather than maintaining control of the colonized lands" (Kemp 97). Considering the British view in Shakespeare's time of Rome as the pinnacle of

ancient civilization and the high regard for Octavius, better known as the Emperor Augustus (whom James I aspired to be compared to), such a juxtaposition would automatically dispose his audiences to side with Rome. Philo's opening lines invite "the audience to view Antony's [and Cleopatra's] state from his Roman point of view, though Antony and Cleopatra themselves, through their words and their behavior to each other, show that there is another point of view about their love" (Gurr and Ichikawa 85). Despite the lovers' presentation of themselves, it is likely that the Roman attitude would be considered more appropriate and acceptable by Shakespeare's original audiences.

Certainly, the Roman viewpoint is presented regularly and forcefully throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*, especially with regard to (from that perspective) Antony's failings and his ensnarement by Cleopatra's evil machinations and performances. Multiple elements in the play conspire to imbue such an attitude with a sense of validity, especially the portrayal of Cleopatra. One of the commonest criticisms of theatricality in the Renaissance was its inherent lack of authenticity, and this too is deployed against the Egyptian queen. Her constant shifts and roleplaying raise the question of who the true Cleopatra is, the play leaving not just characters but spectators uncertain too, by never providing a moment where Cleopatra is not speaking to an audience. The play's forty-four scenes do not feature a single soliloquy or even an aside from Cleopatra. Even Henry V, in the few moments to himself while surveying his troops in disguise, is provided more of an opportunity to unburden his mind before the audience than Cleopatra is. In the world of the play and in the audience watching it, one is never utterly certain that Cleopatra is not engaged in a performance.

The ambiguity and uncertainty raised by Cleopatra's eternal performativity are only heightened by her positioning as an oriental monarch (especially one opposed to the Western

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civilization represented by Rome) and a woman who is unabashedly open about her interest in both power and her physical appetites. This particular identity too would have double meaning at the play's first performances, since the "combination of erotic power and political authority that had made Cleopatra such a troubling figure to Romans and humanists alike might also have struck a responsive chord in Shakespeare's original audiences: they had, until very recently, lived under the sway of their own powerful queen" (Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* 117). It is perhaps not a coincidence that the one Shakespearean drama featuring a queen as the primary character appears after the death of Elizabeth, who might have seen somewhat more of her in Cleopatra than even Richard II, especially the way the Egyptian queen is viewed by those opposed to her. While Cleopatra's displays of protean ability certainly enable a certain degree of power as a woman and a monarch, they also leave her open to the accusations of inauthenticity, many of them unsurprisingly gendered. Naturally, some of the harshest critics are her enemies, particularly Octavius, as when he comments disparagingly on her appearing in divine garb:

> She
> In th' habiliments of the goddess Isis
> That day appear'd; and oft before gave audience,
> As 'tis reported, so. (3.6.19)

Having done so, he swiftly moves to a disparagement of her morals, explaining to his sister Octavia (now Antony's wife) that she has been abandoned due to Cleopatra's sexual influence:

> No, my most wronged sister; Cleopatra
> Hath nodded him to her. He hath given his empire
> Up to a whore (3.6.67-70)

As woman and performer, Cleopatra is promptly tarred with the sort of criticism that the first women who appeared on British stages, after the Restoration, would face as well.

Interestingly, Cleopatra's enemies are hardly the only ones who hurl such accusations at her. The power of her theatrical skills over Antony becomes grounds for criticism from Antony's

Roman followers, as in the case of Philo in 1.1. On multiple occasions, she is characterized as a beguiling enchantress, as in Scarus' description of Antony as the "noble ruin of her magic" (3.10.76). Antony himself takes up this image, describing her and her activities as follows in the span of a few lines: "Triple-turned whore! … For when I am revenged upon my charm … This grave charm… Ah, thou spell! … The witch shall die" (4.12.13, 16, 25, 30, 47). Tellingly, this is neither the first nor the last time in the play that he thus suspects his partner.

In view of such criticisms and the lack of clear evidence of Cleopatra's intentions, it is not wholly surprising that scholars have similarly, and long, doubted the Egyptian queen, some revisiting the misogynist language of the play's Romans. George Bernard Shaw famously stated (using Samuel Johnson's words on Lady Diana Beauclerk), "I always think of what Dr. Johnson said: 'Sir, the long and short of it is, the woman's a whore!' . . . You can't feel any sympathy with Antony after . . . Actium. . . All Shakespeare's rhetoric and pathos cannot reinstate Antony after that, or leave us with a single good word for his woman" (qtd. in Rackin, "Shakespeare's Boy Cleopatra" 202). Even more measured criticisms doubt the genuine nature of Cleopatra's feelings, often laying emphasis on her acting ability, as when E. A. J. Honigmann muses, "Showmanship, we quickly learn, means as much to Cleopatra as love. We often wonder whether she is interested in love for its own sake, or whether she merely needs it as a pretext for posing in amusing new attitudes" (163). For many who experienced *Antony and Cleopatra* after Shakespeare's time and presumably for many of his spectators too, Cleopatra remains a stellar example of the criticisms of performance that the anti-theatricalists brought to bear on the early modern stage.

Considering the fates of Cleopatra and Antony and the triumph of Octavius, the play does seem to present a sustained criticism of theatricality—at least on the surface. There is also,

however, a sustained subtext that runs through *Antony and Cleopatra*, one which both undercuts

the assumption that feigning and theatrics can only be ascribed to the sensual oriental and the

fallen Roman, and provides a subtle assertion of the positive nature of dramatic performance.

Despite all claims to the contrary, theatricality and an emphasis on appearance are as much part

of the Roman world in the play as of the Egyptian. The Romans in *Antony and Cleopatra*,

including those who oppose the two lovers, repeatedly put in substantial effort to achieve the

appearance of honor just as much as, if not more than, the reality. When Pompey's ally Menas

suggests to his leader that they slay the former's two great rivals, Antony and Octavius, who are

currently aboard Pompey's galley, the Roman general refuses to do so, admitting that he would

have happily accepted such an eventuality if he could have appeared honorable while doing so:

> Ah, this thou shouldst have done,
> And not have spoke on't! In me 'tis villany;
> In thee't had been good service. Thou must know,
> 'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;
> Mine honour, it. Repent that e'er thy tongue
> Hath so betray'd thine act: being done unknown,
> I should have found it afterwards well done;
> But must condemn it now. Desist, and drink. (2.7.73-80)

The eventual victor of the triumvirate, Octavius, during his interactions with Antony and, later,

Cleopatra, takes considerable pains to ensure that he is perceived to be coerced into acting

against them in self-defense. Even after Antony's death, he insists that his allies should let him

show them "How hardly I was drawn into this war, / How calm and gentle I proceeded still / In

all my writings" (5.1.76). The future Roman emperor is well aware, as Queen Elizabeth said, that

"princes are set as it were upon stages in the sight and view of the world," and is very careful to

ensure that his "proceedings be just and honorable"—or at least appear so.

Octavius' understanding of the benefits of performance and theatricality are especially

borne out by his ultimate aim when victorious—to exhibit Antony and Cleopatra as part of his

triumph in Rome. His follower Proculeius, immediately after having disarmed Cleopatra when

she tries to stab herself, describes the ill effects of such an action as damaging not her but rather

the performance that Octavius seeks to put on:

> Cleopatra,
> Do not abuse my master's bounty by
> The undoing of yourself: let the world see
> His nobleness well acted, which your death
> Will never let come forth. (5.2.41-45)

Unsurprisingly, the two lovers express their unwillingness to partake in such a display. That is

the primary basis for Antony's request to Eros to aid him in committing suicide:

> Eros,
> Wouldst thou be window'd in great Rome and see
> Thy master thus with pleach'd arms, bending down
> His corrigible neck, his face subdued
> To penetrative shame, whilst the wheel'd seat
> Of fortunate Caesar, drawn before him, branded
> His baseness that ensued? (4.14.71-77)

Cleopatra, the eternal actress, is particularly aware of and opposed to the fate of being displayed

as Octavius wishes. She refuses to partake in "the imperious show / Of the full-fortun'd Caesar"

(4.15.24-25); responds to Proculeius' earlier argument with a refusal to let her captors "hoist me

up / And show me to the shouting varletry / Of censuring Rome" (5.2.54-56); and, later, informs

Iras of exactly what would await them if displayed in Rome:

> Now, Iras, what think'st thou?
> Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shalt be shown
> In Rome, as well as I mechanic slaves
> With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers, shall
> Uplift us to the view; in their thick breaths,
> Rank of gross diet, shall be enclouded,
> And forced to drink their vapour. (5.2.207-213)

The description of the "mechanic slaves," intentionally matching some of the more opprobrious

depictions of the groundlings in anti-theatrical tracts of Shakespeare's time, would perhaps have

been better known for its overt metatheatricality if it had not preceded the famous reference to a "squeaking Cleopatra boy" that follows shortly (5.2.220).

Before one considers the overt metatheater and high theatricality of this closing scene, one should pause to note that Antony's and Cleopatra's deep fears about being displayed and viewed as they would not desire to be arise not simply from the consequence of political defeat but from the earlier events of the play. While a few Shakespearean plays (*Hamlet*, for example) have more on-stage examples of characters being observed in ways they do not wish to, *Antony and Cleopatra* stands alone in the degree to which the actions, appearance, thoughts, character and general identity of characters are reported on to others. Sometimes, as in the opening moments, a narrative is closely followed by an on-stage appearance related to what is being reported, but that occurs in the minority of cases. What occurs far more often is the portrayal (usually, though not always, negative) of individuals to others without any control or mediation by the one being commented on. Cleopatra and Antony are the ones to whom this most occurs, but so too for even relatively minor characters, such as Octavia (in 3.3, which is followed by reports on Octavius, Antony and Cleopatra in 3.4-6). Some of Cleopatra's most strident critics, especially early in the play, are those who have only heard her described or reported on. The two lovers are well aware of these events, having had such reports repeated to them on various occasions, as when Enobarbus warns Cleopatra of how her influence on Antony is viewed in Rome:

> Your presence needs must puzzle Antony;
> Take from his heart, take from his brain, from's time,
> What should not then be spared. He is already
> Traduced for levity; and 'tis said in Rome
> That Photinus, an eunuch, and your maids
> Manage this war. (3.7.10-15)

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In view of this context, it is not surprising that both Antony and Cleopatra seek desperately to exert what control they have over the narratives and performances that they are written into.

While *Antony and Cleopatra* has thus engaged consistently with issues of performance, representation and theatricality, it is in the closing scenes of the play (especially the last) that the metatheatrical relationship between the play and the world within which it is performed comes to its fullest fruition, as does the figure of Cleopatra. As Linda Charnes astutely notes:

> Cleopatra … remains a *practice* rather than a product; and as such, her "infirmity" of identity is the source of her strength. Shakespeare uses the figure of Cleopatra and her multiplicitous and marginal domain as representatives of the place and players of the Renaissance stage: the habitus of the continually changing persons who performed "wrangling" playtexts outside the margins of London and exercised a fascination over the city that uneasily tolerated and kept watch over – through its own spies and whispers – their operations. (147)

In almost every element of her being, Shakespeare's Cleopatra is analogous to the early modern playwrights and actors. She is protean and fascinating, yet deeply troubling and difficult to decipher. She is capable of incredible beauty, but potentially also a source for corruption. She is brilliantly articulate and can control the speech of others, but those in greater power seek to shackle her, making her words and performance suit their own ends. While such connections exist almost exclusively on an implicit level throughout the play, albeit with subtle indications that make their presence clear to an alert audience, the closing scenes make them utterly overt.

The shift towards overt metatheater occurs shortly after a moment of stagecraft that matches the play's use of multiple, shifting locations in implicitly making the theatrical nature of the performance and the reliance on audience imagination even clearer than usual on the Renaissance stage—the monument scene. The scene occurs immediately after Antony's partly botched suicide attempt, which is occasioned by a fear of capture and upon hearing the falsified message of Cleopatra having killed herself (arguably the most influential of the play's many

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reports). A dying Antony is brought to the monument in which Cleopatra and her attendants have

sequestered themselves to avoid capture, and is then pulled up to its top. The scene is "unique in

the Shakespeare canon in that it seems to have demanded a special structure to stage the first of

the play's two tragic deaths" (Gurr and Ichikawa 62). Its oddness is particularly noteworthy in

the context of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Thus far, the play has accepted the limitations of the

physical stage it occupied (and communicated it implicitly) by relying more on verbal

description rather than actual stage business for its geographical shifts and most dramatic visual

moments (as in Enobarbus' speech about the voyage on the Cydnus and the battle of Actium).

Now, paradoxically, by requiring the actors to physically align actions and words, "Shakespeare

brings the histrionic surface of the actors' performances sharply into view, dramatizing the

double vision that the theater requires of its audience as part of our experience of the play"

(Worthen 296). The characters not only engage in physical labor but explicitly describe

themselves doing so, making the theatrical nature of their enterprise clear. Soon afterward, as

Cleopatra prepares for her own death, Shakespeare makes the issue of (meta)theatricality even

more explicit.

Two scenes after the one in the monument, in the process of warning Iras what will occur

if she and her attendants are transported as captives to Rome, Cleopatra delivers the most

explicitly metatheatrical lines in the play:

> Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras: saucy lictors
> Will catch at us, like strumpets; and scald rhymers
> Ballad us out o' tune: the quick comedians
> Extemporally will stage us, and present
> Our Alexandrian revels; Antony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I' the posture of a whore. (5.2.214-221)

In this moment, the boy actor explicitly describes to the Jacobean audience the performance that they are involved in viewing, which the character he plays now disparages. Scholars have long quoted these lines as an example of profound metatheater and, even more often, debated precisely what their effect is and why they occur here. A fairly common tack is to argue that the lines are actually a self-aggrandizing reference by Shakespeare, pointing out to the audience that his company's performance is far greater than what Cleopatra describes, that the accomplished boy actor is not just a "squeaking Cleopatra." A related approach is to treat the lines as simply a passing self-reference to early modern stage practice, a "tribute to the effectiveness of the convention being used that made no bones about admitting the means of performance: i.e. the cross-dressing, the open stage, the dramatic poetry," an appreciative side-glance at staging, which "allowed the spectator to concentrate on the events of the stage fiction and their outcome rather than being distracted by mere verisimilitude" (Mann 118). In view of the fact that *Antony and Cleopatra* is heavily focused on metatheatrical matters and that the engagement has virtually always been implicit rather than explicit, such a simple appraisal—or dismissal—of the lines seems inappropriate.

These lines occur at a point when *Antony and Cleopatra* makes a dramatic shift, one that has been partially signaled by the sudden physicality of the monument scene minutes earlier. Thus far, the play has seemingly presented a strong critique of theatricality and performance, underlining its deleterious influence and negative potentiality to a degree that many Renaissance anti-theatricalists might have appreciated. Most of the negativity has arisen from the Roman perspectives on Cleopatra's character and her corruption of Antony. With Octavius' victory, Roman rectitude and stern duty have seemingly triumphed over dissolute eastern hedonism and theatricality. Yet that too, in keeping with the rest of *Antony and Cleopatra*, is just a show. Thus

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far, Cleopatra's greatest theatrical performances have almost exclusively been a matter of report, as in Enobarbus' fifty-line long speech about her appearance on the Cydnus (2.2.199-249). Now, however, as the play is about to end, she performs in the full view of the theatrical audience and creates a scene that will be her legacy (within the world of the play and, via the performance of Shakespeare's company, in the *theatrum mundi* beyond it). It is in the explicit, multilayered metatheatricality of the "squeaking Cleopatra" speech that this final movement begins. As Phyllis Rackin accurately notes:

> In this speech, and in the scene that follows, the question of her worth is directly associated with the question of the worth of shows. Here she seems to set the two at odds: only if we reject the shows we have seen can we accept the unseen greatness of Cleopatra. But in her suicide she will present a new show that validates both, and even in this speech the validation begins. The very fact that Cleopatra can talk about the show and claim that it is a poor parody implies that she has access to a level of reality beyond what has been presented. By implying the inadequacy of the representation, she implies also that she can transcend it. ("Shakespeare's Boy Cleopatra" 208)

Sir Philip Sidney had argued that only the poet's pen can create a golden world. Having tried and failed to succeed in the brazen world of politics and war, that is precisely what Cleopatra sets out to do here, transcending the physical limitations of her world to achieve a poetic (and dramatic) immortality.

Thus far in the play, Cleopatra has suffered the fate that any actor must risk and which those performing on the controversial and contested Renaissance stage continually faced. In having her performances viewed, described and interpreted by others, she has been subject to a critical audience that she could never completely control. In her final moments, however, she sets out to create a performance with an incontrovertible meaning. Earlier in the play, she has been called a witch, a whore, a strumpet, and a boggler, before being transformed into a Roman captive. Now, Cleopatra utterly repudiates all such criticisms, especially those of unreliable changeability, saying:

My resolution's placed, and I have nothing
Of woman in me: now from head to foot
I am marble-constant; now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine. (5.2.238-241)

Of course, being Cleopatra, the eternally unchanging state that she will now take on ("I have / Immortal longings in me") incorporates multiple layers and components, all of them now fitting into a seamless whole. Nor, as usual, can her words be taken utterly at face value. Despite her claim of ceasing to be a woman, many of the multiple roles Cleopatra now simultaneously embodies are conventionally feminine ones. She is, of course, a lover, remembering her greatest performance from the past, when she appeared as Venus herself: "I am again for Cydnus, / To meet Mark Antony" (5.2.228-229). She is also a wife, boldly taking a difficult journey to meet her absent spouse: "Husband, I come: / Now to that name my courage prove my title!" (5.2.284-285). She also presents herself rhetorically as a mother, as the asp bites her: "Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep?" (5.2.306-307). She is a kind mistress and a friend, bidding her followers a sad goodbye: "Farewell, kind Charmian. Iras, long farewell" (5.2.289). Above all else, she is what she has always wished to be considered, a mighty monarch, commanding her attendants: "Show me, my women, like a queen" (5.2.227). And moments after her death, Charmian identifies her as a celestial deity, the goddess Venus shining in the night sky: "O eastern star!" (5.2.305)

This moment of incredible dramaturgy on the part of character and playwright is quite unequivocally metatheatrical. Cleopatra not only invests herself rhetorically with grandeur, but is physically dressed on stage in a manner that befits her position and final moments. Even as she seeks to transubstantiate herself spiritually and gain an eternal fame, saying, "I have / Immortal longings in me" (277-278) and "I am fire and air; my other elements / I give to baser life" (286-287), she simultaneously orders her attendants, "Give me my robe, put on my crown" (277).

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Even after she has died, both her spiritual self and her physical stage appearance are commented on, with Charmian saying, "Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies / A lass unparallel'd" before addressing Cleopatra's corpse to say, "Your crown's awry; / I'll mend it, and then play—" (5.2.312-313, 315-316). Shakespeare's choice to thus dramatize the scene is key to its function as the denouement (and, in many ways, reversal) of the play's treatment of theatricality. Acting and performance have been viewed skeptically throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*, seemingly for good reason. To have Cleopatra achieve a moment of transcendent splendor now would perhaps redeem her character, but if presented purely rhetorically, would not only provide no such redemption for the subject of theatricality, but would imply that purity and beauty are found only in poetry, not dramatic performance. By blending words and stage business, with the former explicitly commenting on and drawing attention to the latter, Shakespeare communicates the fact that Cleopatra's triumph lies not only in her verbal flourishes but also in the theatrical display that they enable her to achieve. Similar grandeur and beauty, by extension, may be found in the theatrical business that the playwright and his actors are involved in, as is indicated by the explicit connection drawn between the theatrical Cleopatra and the boy actors playing her, Iras and Charmian.

In sharp contrast to virtually all her earlier on-stage actions, Cleopatra's last performance is an utter success, robbing Octavius of his triumph and replacing the theatrical display that he sought to force her into with one of her own choosing, one which (as the dying Charmian says), "is well done, and fitting for a princess / Descended of so many royal kings" (5.2.323-324). A significant sign of its efficacy lies in the admiring responses which Cleopatra's death draws from the greatest of her critics, Octavius himself:

Bravest at the last,

> She levell'd at our purposes, and, being royal,
> Took her own way.
> …
>   Take up her bed;
> And bear her women from the monument:
> She shall be buried by her Antony:
> No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
> A pair so famous. High events as these
> Strike those that make them; and their story is
> No less in pity than his glory which
> Brought them to be lamented. Our army shall
> In solemn show attend this funeral;
> And then to Rome. Come, Dolabella, see
> High order in this great solemnity. (5.2.332-334, 353-363).

Octavius does try here, as he has often done earlier in the play, to aggrandize his own glory via a reference to himself as the conqueror of Cleopatra and Antony, but it is a faint echo of his earlier successes. At the end of the play, the performer has finally overcome the critical gazes of critic and spectator, achieving a matchless immortality, though paradoxically only through the act of self-annihilation.

As was the case in the analysis of *The Spanish Tragedy* in the preceding chapter, the areas considered above are only some of the places where *Antony and Cleopatra* utilizes the metatheatrical mode. Considering them should, however, indicate how the play provides a multifaceted exploration of the nature of theatricality and performance, one that simultaneously recognizes its beauties and its negatives, its potential for spiritually uplifting and morally corrupting, and its reliance on both the actor and the spectator. It utilizes the figure of the monarch-player as both subject and tool and, especially if considered in conjunction with *Henry V* (or Shakespeare's other history plays), reveals exactly how versatile a figure it was on the Renaissance stage, allowing even a single playwright to deploy it in varied ways. The metatheatricality of *Antony and Cleopatra* also allows it to speak strongly of the conditions under which it was created. Jonson's praise, later bardolatory and Emmerich's *Anonymous*

notwithstanding, Shakespeare's work *was* completely a product of his age. *Antony and Cleopatra* was specifically composed in and for a particular theatrical moment, one where boys played women on stage, when audiences surrounded a mostly bare stage, when theatre was— problematically but enticingly—always potentially corruptive and seditious, and, arguably, when a powerful queen had recently reigned but did so no longer. The play's deployment of metatheater inevitably speaks to such influences and concerns, allowing those separated from its unique moment to gain somewhat of a sense of its manner of creation, performance and reception. Lastly, it allows the play to explicate, as *Henry V* too and early modern drama in general does, how dramatic performance is intrinsic to human existence, whether for the kings and queens of the world or for the audience of commoners who watch them strut their way across the stage in both the theater and the world outside it.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE:

METATHEATER TOO FAR?

Among individual dramas, one of the primary exemplars of Renaissance metatheater is

The Knight of the Burning Pestle, arguably providing a more consistent, expansive and

sophisticated display of metatheatricality than virtually any other play that appeared on the

Elizabethan and Jacobean stages. While studies of Renaissance metatheater regularly reference

Francis Beaumont's play, relatively few address an important element of its stage history—an

utter failure upon its first appearance, at the Blackfriars theater in 1607. In fact, *The Knight of the*

Burning Pestle performed so woefully that a revival was not attempted for nearly thirty years.

The play's popularity and current reputation as a masterpiece of Renaissance dramaturgy is

retroactive, occurring primarily in the twentieth century. In view of its lack of success in its own

time, one can understand why scholars who appreciate the play and argue for its sophisticated

metatheatricality often ignore or only vaguely address its stage history. I would contend,

however, that the specific nature and metatheatricality of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*

directly affected its original failure. This unintended effect points to the complexity of the

practice of Renaissance metatheater, especially the manner in which it arose from and mediated

the nature of the early modern theater audience and their perception of, and response to, the plays

that were written and performed for them.

When scholars do address and try to explain the play's original failure, a few theories

tend to recur, the most popular supposition being that *The Knight*'s sophistication and dizzying

display of metatheatricality was simply too much for the audience to handle.

> There has been much throwing about of brains over the play's failure: Andrew Gurr suggests that there may have been too many citizens in the audience, and they were not amused; Michael Shapiro, that the audience saw no attractive aristocratic figures to identify with. But I think it comes down in the end to Lee Bliss' suggestion that Beaumont was simply asking too much. (Leggatt 312-313)

This assumption about the original audience simply failing to appreciate (or understand) the playwright's skill actually has a longer history than the play's eventual success. In "To his many ways endeared friend, Master Robert Keysar," his dedicatory letter to the first quarto (1613), its publisher Walter Burre described *The Knight* as follows:

> This unfortunate child, who in eight days (as lately I have learned) was begot and born, soon after was by his parents (perhaps because he was so unlike his brethren) exposed to the wide world, who for want of judgement, or not understanding the privy mark of irony about it (which showed it was no offspring of any vulgar brain) utterly rejected it… (51)

Popular though this argument might be, I propose a different possibility. If one considers the play as a whole, especially its usage of metatheater, one finds within it a sustained criticism of theater audiences in general. This expression of the critique (and the use of metatheatricality) is strongly tied to the Blackfriars theater (its physical nature, its position in the theatrical world of early seventeenth century London, and the manner in which the play was first performed within it) where it originally appeared. Unsurprisingly, the original spectators of the play at the venue failed to respond to such criticism with great appreciation.

While scholars have noted the above possibility, they have rarely made much of it. Dana E. Aspinall does attempt to provide an original explanation for the play's failure, noting its criticism of the theater-going public. He, however, sees the play repudiating popular folk humor and embracing the political and social status quo, and claims that "Beaumont's consistent hostility toward an intrusive folk humor strain, emanating from George's, Nell's, and Rafe's repeated stage directives, undeniably led to its popular failure" (170). For Aspinall, who views Beaumont's play as placing itself squarely in favor of the upper-class and court in Jacobean

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England, what "Beaumont enacts in *The Knight* is a thorough recording of the lower class's tastes and desires, holding them up for display so that others can mock as well" (174). To a certain degree, I would agree with Aspinall's description of the play's treatment of the lower classes, as represented via the grocer George, his wife Nell and their apprentice Rafe. I would argue, however, that the play's satiric treatment of the fictionalized spectators quickly extends beyond the bounds of class, functioning as a trenchant criticism of all spectators who lack true theatrical vision and imagination, failing to adequately appreciate the work of dramatists and players. Whether the breadth of the criticism was intentional or not, the effect is enabled and heightened by the play's deployment and use of the metatheatrical mode.

Crossing boundaries

One of the primary effects of metatheater in *The Knight* is to achieve an expansion of apparent boundaries and an exploration of the fluid connections between seemingly separate or even opposed subjects. The play actually consists, as has been often noted and praised, of three interlinked plays. Unlike most other uses of the play-within-a-play technique in early modern drama, *The Knight* eschews clear boundaries between the various plays, allowing them to blend into and develop off one another. The events of each play, such as the Citizen's and his Wife's criticism of what occurs on the stage on which they are seated, inevitably affect and mediate what occurs in the other two (the city comedy—*The London Merchant*—and the purportedly impromptu play featuring Rafe, the newly-dubbed Knight of the Burning Pestle). Thematically, the three plays themselves share similar concerns with fluid boundaries and oppositions. To use one example, the *London Merchant*, with its characters moving constantly around recognizable areas marginal to the capital city, "centres on a polarity between London and non-London and is dominated by a tension between mobility and staying put" (Dillon 100). Similarly, Rafe's play

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has the errant Knight move between geographical areas that Beaumont's original audience would have recognized in and around London (such as his 'dying' reference to the popular Moorfields (5.328) area north of the city) and locations geographically far from England, as when he meets the princess Pompiona, daughter of the King of Cracovia, the old name for Cracow (4.55). Sometimes the traveling Knight even shares the same geography as the characters in *The London Merchant*, as when he stumbles on Jasper and Luce and, in a brilliant moment of apparent improvisation (which, of course, is staged on multiple levels), is beaten by Jasper (2.310) for his trouble. While there is no such geographical movement for the framing play of George and Nell, their constant referencing of elements of London and the way their presence dramatizes the interplay of various classes in the theater audience makes it "yet another play staging the collision between London and not-London, and one which is located on the Blackfriars stage itself" (Dillon 100).

Not only are the boundaries between the three plays that comprise *The Knight* porous, but so too are those between Beaumont's play and other dramas that the original audience would have seen at the Blackfriars and additional theaters around London. While most Renaissance plays reference other dramas, recent or ancient, *The Knight* is again somewhat exceptional in the degree to which it does so. *The London Merchant* serves as a "parody of the prodigal son plays that had been having a certain vogue in the Jacobean public theaters," making the aim explicit by borrowing the name of Luce, the heroine, from "a recent example, *The London Prodigal* of 1605" (Finkelpearl 83). When Rafe is first asked to display his histrionic abilities and justify his mistress' claim that he can act as well as any member of the troupe performing *The London Merchant*, he chooses a "huffing part" (Induction 74), one of Hotspur's grandiose speeches from *Henry IV*, *Part I*. Recognizable echoes of other plays and genres proliferate throughout *The*

Knight, such as to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the love scenes in the forest; the ghostly

occurrences of *Macbeth, Hamlet* and numerous revenge plays; the high-flown dying speeches

about metaphysical truth found in *A Spanish Tragedy* and other such tragedies; the festive

traditions of carnivalesque dramas mimicked in Rafe's May-lord speech (Interlude 4. 27); the

citizen-hero romantic comedies, such as Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*; and

various chivalric romances, especially from Spain (Mousley 35).

Such a broadly referential approach facilitates *The Knight*'s metatheatrical exploration of

the nature of theater (especially in contemporary London) and the role of audience imagination

in its functioning, but it militates against the specificity of what has been traditionally seen as

one of the play's primary aims, namely "the satire on the theatrical and literary naivety of the

Citizen and his wife" (Clark 66). The play's fluid boundaries and constant eschewing of narrow

demarcation prevents its satire from being bounded by individual or class boundaries. Rather

than only representing middle-class theatergoers, Nell and George (who display a fairly catholic

taste and knowledge of London drama, which extends beyond what critics often choose to assign

them) and their apprentice Rafe instead become emblematic of the theatergoing public as a

whole. Hence, the play's implicit critique of them and their mockery by the boys performing *The*

London Merchant overflows its bounds (in the same manner that *The Knight* constantly seeks to)

and instead seems applicable to theatrical spectatorship as a whole. Unsurprisingly, Beaumont's

original audience did not respond positively to such an effect.

Occupying the stage

While the play's thematic use of metatheater contributes to the presumably unintended

effect of the Citizen and his Wife becoming representatives of the audience as a whole, *The*

Knight's metatheatrical usage of the physical stage space at the Blackfriars is an equally

important factor in the effect. The common scholarly assumption about the physical positioning of George and Nell before they interfere in the play is that they are sitting in the audience, with Rafe, when the Prologue begins to speak. At this point, the Citizen expresses his disapproval (ironic and prescient, in view of what *The Knight* contains) of the upcoming *The London Merchant* and the likelihood that it will contain "girds at citizens" (Induction 5). The pair then proceed to cross theatrical and social boundaries, since they not only transgress that "between audience and stage by climbing on to the stage, but invade the personal space of the gentlemen already seated on the stage by requiring them to 'make a little room' and even to get up and lend a hand to help the Wife up" (Dillon 100). Or so goes the standard story of how *The Knight* begins. However, a consideration of the textual evidence suggests another, far more intriguing, possibility.

The list of speakers in the play (provided in the second quarto) explicitly separates the Citizen from his Wife and Rafe, the latter pair (but not the Citizen) being described as "sitting below amidst the Spectators." However, as Leslie Thomson notes, the first quarto text contains only the stage direction "*Enter* Citizen," to which many "modern editors helpfully add some version of '[climbing to the stage]'" (62). Nell certainly enacts that movement, but there is no indication in the spoken lines that George has to do so. What seems equally likely is that he enters from the tiring house to sit on the stage with a stool, as gentleman at the play willing to spend extra money to be seen by the audience around them would have done at the Blackfriars (see Chapter 2). Thomas Dekker, in *The Gull's Hornbook*, suggests mockingly to play-going wits that they emerge after the prologue so as to be seen to best advantage: "then it is time, as though you were one of the properties, or that you dropped out of ye hangings, to creep from behind the arras with your tripos or three-footed stool in one hand and a teston mounted upon a

forefinger and a thumb in the other" (63). George, much more obstreperously than Dekker was recommending, emerges during the prologue and makes his interruption.

Once George has entered from the tiring house and Nell begun to make suggestions from the audience, she is hoisted to the stage. George asks "Rafe, help your mistress to the stage" and requests the seated "gentlemen, make her a little room", asking one to "lend me your hand to help up my wife" (Prologue 46-48). This action physically underlines the seeming separation between the audience space and the stage at the Blackfriars, which lacked any element (such as stairs) connecting it directly to the area beyond (Irwin Smith 311). From a thematic viewpoint, having George enter with the gentlemen and Nell rise out of the audience dovetails with the crossing of boundaries that is central to *The Knight*'s functioning. Their original positioning and subsequent movements also help the play to "blur the lines among players, characters, and playgoers—between the art of comedy and the reality of everyday life" (Thomson 61). What the combination of George and Nell's original positions also achieves is the aforementioned effect of making the two of them particularly representative of the audience as a whole.

The initial physical positions of George, entering and seated among the stage-sitters, and Nell, in the audience below, place them in physical and metaphorical proximity with all who attend the play. Then, by uniting them on the stage, *The Knight* places them among the higher class and most visible members of the audience that the play was performed for. In the private theaters, where the audience was crammed even more closely around the stage than at the public amphitheaters, it was particularly common to have "the story of stage and audience frequently meld together, and Blackfriars plays often have internal events—masques, songs, dances—that call for a 'staged' audience of actors" (Stern 47). Such fictional groups often sat right next to the gentlemen on their stools, physically and thematically mimicking each other. While their class

positions may theoretically separate George and Nell from the gentlemen and, by extension, the more sophisticated Blackfriars audience (and thus render their satirizing a safe activity), the physical nature of the stage space and their positioning within it have a dramatically different effect. Within the cramped theatrical space of the Blackfriars, it was not simply one's class but rather one's visibility which made an individual notable, which was the reason behind the existence of the stage-sitters. George's initial appearance from the tiring-house, stool in hand, automatically makes him one of them, while Nell's original position below the stage connects her to the rest of the audience. The effect of their initial positioning is to make the pair effectively speak for the entire Blackfriars spectatorship.

Besides their physical positioning, the actions of Nell and George also contribute to make them effectively function as representatives for the audience as a whole. From the moment they are both seated on stage, the two of them (especially Nell) constantly address the real audience-members seated by their side. For example, when initially arguing for the addition of Rafe to the play and having made him speak a short piece to display his acting ability, George turns to those seated nearby and asks, "How say you, gentlemen? Is it not as I told you?" Nell quickly forestalls any complaint by adding, "Nay, gentlemen; he hath played before, my husband says, Mucedorus before the wardens of our company" (Induction 82-84). While these initial words could arguably be perceived as overly familiar, the sheer volume of addresses from them to the "gentlemen" eventually makes such exchanges a customary part of the play, serving to "increase the sense of George and Nell as audience rather than boy actors" (Thomson 64). A particularly interesting example occurs near the end of Act 3, when Old Merrythought's cavalier treatment of his wife raises Nell's ire, causing her to tell her husband, "Get me some drink, George, I am almost molten with fretting; now beshrew his knave's heart for it!" (3.559-561). George exits at

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this point, returning as the Act ends a few moments later with the beer, which Nell has him share

with those on stage:

> *Wife.* Come George, where's the beer?
> *Citizen.* Here, love.
> *Wife.* This old fornicating fellow will not out of my mind yet. — Gentlemen, I'll begin to
> you all, and I desire more of your acquaintance, with all my heart. [*Drinks*] — Fill the
> gentlemen some beer, George. (Interlude 3.1-6)

While the stage directions reveal nothing about how George departs and returns, it is quite likely

that he descends into the audience, where refreshments would have been sold in the playhouse

during the performance, and returns from there with the beer. George's physical crossing and re-

crossing of the boundary between stage and off-stage audience, followed by Nell's verbal

statement of appreciation for the stage-sitters with her (and possibly the act of George pouring

them beer, which would hardly be out of place in this play), once more emphasizes the

connection between the couple and the various sections of the audience—on or offstage—around

them.

The stage and the tiring house

The sophisticated and innovative boundary-crossing that *The Knight* displays contributes

substantially to the above effect. Just as he utilizes and plays with the delineations of audience

and stage space, "Beaumont uses another related division—between stage and tiring house—in

ways that are both unique to this comedy and directly relevant to its particular manipulation of

audience response" (Thomson 61). George's appearance among the wits and courtiers from the

tiring house is only one example. A more protracted one lies in the way the tiring house

represents parts of the play world and the audience's physical and metaphorical juxtaposition

with it. Early in the play, the stage and theater audience are placed in the same proximal position

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as Mistress Merrythought, as she ends a conversation before them with her sons Jasper and

Michael by rebuking the former and sending the pair indoors.

> I'faith, I had sorrow enough for thee, God knows; but I'll hamper thee well enough. Get
> thee in, thou vagabond, get thee in, and learn of thy brother Michael.
> [*Exeunt Jasper and Michael*] (1.346-348)

Now, while she remains on stage, Old Master Merrythought is heard singing within the tiring

house before he emerges. In this scene, the audience is seemingly positioned with Mistress

Merrythought outside her home. The Citizen and Wife, at least, certainly sympathize with her

position with regard to her cheerfully wastrel husband, Nell describing the latter as "a foolish old

man" (1.374). While their judgment certainly has some basis, the progression of the play makes

it clear that the audience's sympathies should lie with Old Merrythought, who replaces the

traditional figure of the prodigal son with a prodigal father. By the end of *The Knight*, Mistress

Merrythought has to return to him, beg his forgiveness and admit her error. Furthermore, the

physical perambulations of the various characters in *The London Merchant* culminate eventually

in Old Merrythought's home, making him a benevolent, if idiosyncratic, lord whose domain

achieves peaceful resolution for everyone. All of this is achieved without Merrythought himself

having to surrender or modify his initial position, indicating that his is the superior philosophy in

the play. Thus, George and Nell's original repudiation of his non-materialistic attitude could

have appeared to be a satiric comment about the mercenary greed of the merchant class. By the

end of *The Knight*, however, the two citizens are explicitly and visibly united with the rest of the

audience in their acceptance (and physical sharing) of his position.

In the last Act of *The Knight*, the characters of *The London Merchant* all arrive at the

Merrythought home. Now, however, the Blackfriars audience has their initial physical (and,

presumably, mental) perspective reversed, being transported inside the home without shifting

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positions on stage. In one of the reversals that early modern audiences were regularly expected to adapt to, the tiring house, which originally represented the interior of Merrythought's house, now stands for the world outside. When Mistress Merrythought and Michael arrive at the home, they do so within, with her calling out to the stage (now the inside of the home), "What, Master Merrythought, will you not let's in? What do you think shall become of us?" (5.203-204). Her husband, standing on stage, responds, "What voice is it that calleth at our door?" (5.205). In Merrythought's words, the entrance portal to the stage is the same door to the home that appeared in Act 1, but the audience now physically sees it with him, from within the home, just as they (seemingly) share his mental perspective. Whereas in the earlier Act it was Mistress Merrythought who chose to leave him and move on in hopes of a better future for Michael and herself, now both mother and son have to follow the father's command and sing before they will be admitted (as does the Merchant Venturewell too, moments later). Not only does this neat reversal of what the stage represents provide a subtly metatheatrical reminder of the imaginative leaps which are regularly required of a theater audience (a leap which, it should be noted, George and Nell have no difficulty in making), but it also physically shows how the perspectives of the Citizen and his Wife now align much more closely with the rest of the audience's (and vice versa). Unlike their original kibitzing dislike of Old Merrythought, now they are united with those around them in an acceptance of his perspective (and physically aligned in the same space via the stage's imaginative movement). Considering this linkage between their perspectives and that of the rest of the audience, as well as the characters involved in the festive ending on stage, the two citizens now seem far less appropriate a subject of satire or ridicule than they were once positioned as. The closing of *The Knight* especially works against the satirizing of the couple on

stage and might in its own way have contributed to the play's theatrical failure, while

simultaneously fitting well with its metatheatrical explorations and experimentation.

Satire at the playhouse

Another possible reason why the play's original audience evidently did not respond with

great appreciation to his satirizing of the Citizen and his Wife likely lies in the particular context

within which *The Knight* first appeared. Its performance by a boys company (probably called the

Children of the Chapel at this point, though they played under a series of titles) on the

Blackfriars stage would have indicated to the audience that there was a high probability of it

being satiric, possibly even scandalously so, and that potential element might have been a major

draw. Due to a variety of reasons, the boys companies playing at private theaters in London had

developed a repertoire of plays, and an accompanying reputation, which heavily emphasized

satiric elements. In the three years before Beaumont's play was performed, the Children of the

Chapel at Blackfriars annually had difficulties with the authorities due to their satiric choices.

They performed Samuel Daniel's *Philotas* in 1604, which referenced the Essex rebellion and got

the playwright fired as their licenser of plays. In 1605, their performance of *Eastward Hoe*,

satirizing the Scots, landed two of its playwrights (Chapman and Jonson) in jail and forced a

third (Marston) to flee. John Day's *The Isle of Gulls* in 1606, which satirized King James and the

Scottish supporters he had brought to London, lost the company Queen Anne's patronage and

landed the leading actors in jail. The audience for Beaumont's play might easily have hoped for

something of the same. What they likely did not expect, however, was that the butt of the play's

jokes and criticism would be audience-members who fail to understand a play and respond to it

as the playwright and players would like them to. Such criticism likely struck a little closer to

home than the spectators might have preferred and contributed to their rejection of the play.

Just as experienced playgoers would have expected satire at the Blackfriars, they would

also have had reason to be somewhat suspicious of the playwright's criticism of certain audience

responses. Renaissance drama has a long tradition of playwrights whose plays failed to achieve

the reception they wished and who responded by railing, often in the prologues of subsequent

plays, at unappreciative audiences. Ben Jonson, for example, famously responded thus after the

failure of *Sejanus*. Beaumont, while generally not indulging in such responses in his dramas,

evidently shared some of Jonson's ideas about the playwright's art often being viewed by those

lacking the capacity to fully understand and appreciate it. In his "To my friend Maister John

Fletcher upon his Faithfull Shepheardess," a prefatory poem to *The Faithful Shepherdess* by John

Fletcher (the collaborator and friend with whom he produced the vast majority of his plays

beside *The Knight*), Beaumont wrote:

> Why should the man, whose wit ne'r had a stain,
> Upon the publick Stage present his vain,
> And make a thousand men in judgment sit,
> To call in question his undoubted wit,
> Scarce two of which can understand the laws
> Which they should judge by, nor the parties cause? (11-16)

Considering that *The Faithful Shepherdess* first appeared only a year after *The Knight*, performed

at the Blackfriars by the same boys company in 1608, it is an intriguing possibility that the above

lines may have derived from Beaumont's own failure on that stage—and an ironic one, since *The*

Faithful Shepherdess failed utterly as well. While these lines were yet to appear when *The*

Knight was first performed, the attitude expressed within them was fairly common from

Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, and the Blackfriars audience might have felt something

of the kind being expressed in the play's mockery of ignorant playgoers. The placement of the

Citizen and his Wife on stage among the gentry might have signaled such criticism as well, since

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playwrights often complained about the distraction and demanding nature of those seated on their stages while the plays were performed.

The Knight does seek in various ways to restrict the satire to the Citizen, his Wife and Rafe (and, by extension, the working classes that they represent), casting them as outliers in the Blackfriars audience. One of the strategies used repeatedly is that of emphasizing the pair's interference in the performance, while implying that the "gentlemen" on stage with them would have a differing view. In the middle of the second Act, George shouts for one of the boys to come out to him and insists that Rafe be allowed to fight Jasper, leading to the following exchange:

> *Boy.* Sir, you must pardon us; the plot of our play lies contrary, and 'twill hazard the spoiling of our play.
> *Citizen.* Plot me no plots. I'll ha' Rafe come out. I'll make your house too hot for you else.
> *Boy*. Why, sir, he shall; but if anything fall out of order, the gentlemen must pardon us. (2.271-276)

Similarly, in the next Act, the Citizen and his Wife actually cut off Mistress Merrythought as she appears on stage and ask her to leave so that they can see Rafe fight a giant. Again, the Boy who is called on stage complains about their plan, "In good faith, sir, we cannot. You'll utterly spoil our play and make it to be hissed, and it cost money. You will not suffer us to go on with our plot.—I pray, gentlemen, rule him" (3.296-299). Similarly, during the break between the fourth and fifth Acts, the pair insist that Rafe come out to perform a May dance, leading the Boy to ask, "Why, sir, you do not think of our plot; what will become of that, then?" (Interlude 4.12-13). When George brusquely insists, the Boy acquiesces, grumbling, "Well, sir, he shall come out. But if our play miscarry, sir, you are like to pay for't" (Interlude 4.19-20). The constant refrain of "our play" and the references to the "gentlemen" in the first two cases would potentially have marked George and Nell as separate from those who are here to see and enjoy the boys' play,

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especially those seated on stage with them. However, as noted previously, the deployment of

metatheater in *The Knight* serves to regularly underline the connection between them and the

theater audience, including the stage-sitters, rendering such limited attempts at separation moot.

The Blackfriars audience

Furthermore, the composition of the Blackfriars audience itself might have been a factor.

Andrew Gurr argues that the fact that "such an extravagant burlesque of citizen plays should be

construed by the audience as a straight pro-citizen play rather implies that the city element in the

audience was much stronger than Beaumont bargained for" (*Shakespearean Stage* 267). Without

necessarily seeing *The Knight* as Aspinall does, as a violent attack on more plebian elements in

London, I would consider it highly unlikely that *The Knight* was taken as a "pro-citizen" play (as

I shall explain in more detail later). That said, one should note the likelihood that Gurr is

otherwise correct—that Beaumont was somewhat wrong about his audience's composition. The

satirizing of George, Nell and Rafe clearly sets them up as spectators one might more likely see

at the public, open-air theaters rather than at the private, indoor Blackfriars. Apprentices like

Rafe were considered "a notorious part of the amphitheatre experience" (Whitney 186). Multiple

lines from George and Nell indicate their familiarity with the public theaters. When George asks

for music, "his familiarity with the open-air playhouses leads him to ask for shawms, a form of

hautboy sometimes used as a kind of bagpipe. The hall playhouse boy diplomatically tells him

that the boy company only has recorders" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 215), a fact necessitated

by the acoustic qualities of the smaller, more intimate private staging spaces. Various

Renaissance scholars similarly separate public and private audiences, arguing that "the

Blackfriars audience around and on the stage will have been strikingly different from the one

around the Globe" and that "the atmosphere of the theater and the very look of the audience,

quite apart from their opinions, were 'part' of performance and affected the plays written for them" (Stern 42, 41). While the nature of Renaissance audiences certainly affected the plays composed for them, assuming discrete and clear divisions between those in public and private theaters might be too simple an assumption.

Certainly, some evidence exists to the contrary. The same plays were regularly performed successfully at both indoor and outdoor venues, such as by the King's Men. From August 1608, when they repossessed the Blackfriars (constructed, as noted in Chapter 2, by James Burbage for this purpose in 1594), for "the next thirty-four years they played seasonally, in the summer at the open-air Globe [, which was rebuilt after the fire of 1613 to this end,] and through each winter at the roofed Blackfriars" (Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594-1642*). There is, however, no genuine evidence of any real change in the company repertoire for the different playhouses. Roslyn Knutson, arguing that there was no separate "Blackfriars Repertory," lists a number of plays produced by the King's Men in the years following their gaining of the Blackfriars lease with surviving title-page advertisements that state they were also performed at the Globe. *Pericles* and *A Game of Chess* are two such examples, while *A King and No King* and *Philaster* originally appeared with references to the Globe and when reprinted, "carried title-page advertisements of both playhouses, as did printings of *Othello* in 1622 and *The Duchess of Malfi* in 1623" (57). The successful appearance of the same plays at both indoor and outdoor playhouses implies some commonality between the audiences at each. Furthermore, the aforementioned plethora of references to other plays in *The Knight*, many of which appeared primarily at the public theaters, would also have only achieved their metatheatrical effect if the Blackfriars audience had some experience of plays at other venues.

The assumption among critics of a dramatic difference in audiences relies heavily on the price differences for attending public and private theaters, such as between the one penny charged for standing in the pit at the Globe and the basic rate of three to sixpence required for entrance to the highest—and cheapest—of the three galleries at the Blackfriars (Gurr, *Playgoing* 31). While prices certainly affected audience composition, focusing solely on them ignores the role of class and how individuals in Renaissance society at all levels often paid at the theater for the privilege of being seen among their social betters and separated from their supposed inferiors—as in the anecdote of an ex-soldier at a play in the 'middle level' at the Blackfriars, the "kind of man with little money but too high a social status to join the 'sixpenny mechanicks' [as Ben Jonson mocked them in the induction to *The Magnetic Lady*] in the topmost gallery" (Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage* 195). Considering the social benefits of visibility and the growing wealth of the mercantile classes in England (and especially London), both Beaumont and some later scholars may have underestimated exactly how representative a figure like the Grocer would have been at the Blackfriars.

Unfortunately, actual documentary evidence from playgoers of the presence of citizens at the indoor playhouses is almost non-existent. One should note, however, that such evidence is also lacking in the case of the outdoor amphitheaters (including before the private playhouses emerged), where prices were certainly not as much of a deterrent. It is also worth noting that the rising popularity of indoor playhouses such as Blackfriars and the boys companies playing there meant that many for whom the prices were onerous still attended them. Students from the various Inns of Court, for example, were apparently regular playgoers, though some bemoaned the prices they had to pay. John Newdigate, a student at the Inner Temple, mentions eight visits to playhouses, including two to the Blackfriars, while John Greene, a student at Lincoln's Inn, kept

records in his diary of seeing multiple plays, many of which were performed at the Blackfriars

(Gurr, *Playgoing* 239, 233). Another student from Lincoln's Inn, Henry Fitzgeoffrey, provides

one of the more detailed reports of a visit to Blackfriars. In his *Notes from Black-Fryers* (the

third of his three books that are combined in his *Satyres: and Satyricall Epigrams with Certaine*

Obseruations at Black-Fryers), he particularly comments on the period before the play begins,

"when playgoers arrive early to find good seats, and set a social stage of display, look and

encounter" (Whitney 129). Fitzgeoffrey complains about having to share the playhouse with

audience-members whom he finds beneath his station, such as the "Cheapside dame," who could

be a merchant's wife or a prostitute, or the "Rascall Page" who woos higher-ranking women.

Clearly, the snobbish student found himself among playgoers from various economic classes and

backgrounds, as was quite likely the case for the first performance of *The Knight*.

A reference even more appropriate to the fictional audience that we find in George and

Nell can be found in Henry Peacham's pamphlet *The Art of Living in London* (publ. 1642), a

supplement to his *Compleat Gentleman*. Peacham relates the tale of a "tradesman's wife of the

Exchange … [who] desired him he would give her leave to go see a play; which she had not

done in seven years." This unnamed woman has a fairly similar experience to Nell, even being

accompanied by her own version of Rafe, since her husband "bade her take his apprentice along

with her, and go; but especially to have a care of her purse; which she warranted she would.

Sitting in a box, among some gallants and gallant wenches," the tradesman's wife returns from

the play to say that she was pickpocketed by someone who put his hand under her petticoat.

Amusingly, her defense is that she "felt one's hand there, but I did not think he had come for

that." The story implies that Peacham possesses a certain degree of "contempt for a money-

conscious citizen and his wife who is little more than a foolish and vulnerable sex object" (Gurr,

Playgoing 7). It does also provide some limited support for the image of Nell at the play with her apprentice Rafe in tow. The playhouse in Peacham's anecdote is not identified, but the reference to the woman sitting in a box indicates that it was an indoor playhouse like the Blackfriars and that she was willing to pay the same amount for the privileged seating as the "gallants and gallant wenches" she sat amidst.

Money in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*

Ironically, while it was their catering to those able to afford higher prices that primarily raised private theaters above the public amphitheaters, the financial wherewithal of George and Nell plays a significant role in their parodying on the Blackfriars stage. They are made analogous to the character referenced in the title of *The London Merchant*, "with their poor taste, naïve dramatic sensibility, and ostentatious dispensing of money (to both the players and the characters), while the merchant Venturewell tries to augment his wealth and social status by matching his daughter to the 'gentle' Humphrey, all the while unable to discern Humphrey's lack of 'true' gentility" (Lesser 72). *The Knight* stages the opposition between two dramatically different philosophies towards money and material wealth. On one hand, there is the greedy merchant Venturewell, whose only care for his daughter Luce appears to be that he "had found a wealthy husband for her" (1.12). On the opposing side there is Old Merrythought, who has not the slightest pecuniary interest, singing, "Who can sing a merrier note / Than he that cannot change a groat? / Not a denier left, and yet my heart leaps" (4.327-329). As previously noted, by the end of the play, the latter's attitude is clearly marked as superior, with Venturewell coming to him for aid and saying, "I am come to ask you / Forgiveness for the wrongs I offered you" (5.249-250). In *The Knight*, if the love of money is not the root of all evil it is certainly a negative quality.

From early in their appearance, George and Nell are aligned with Venturewell, being

made to appear not only particularly invested in their money but profligate and gauche in its use.

George pays "two shillings" at the start of the play, asking to have "the waits of Southwark"

(Induction 105-106), wind instrument players maintained by the city, brought to the theater to

provide appropriate music for Rafe. Midway through the play, in a significantly multilayered

treatment of metatheater and imagination, Rafe insists on seeing the Bell Inn in Waltham as a

hospitable castle for errant knights while the innkeeper and tapster insist on payment for the

night:

> *Tap*. Sir, there is twelve shillings to pay.
> *Ralph*. Thou merry Squire Tapstero, thanks to thee
> For comforting our souls with double jug:
> And, if adventurous fortune prick thee forth,
> Thou jovial squire, to follow feats of arms,
> Take heed thou tender every lady's cause,
> Every true knight, and every damsel fair;
> But spill the blood of treacherous Saracens,
> And false enchanters that with magic spells
> Have done to death full many a noble knight.
> *Host*. Thou valiant Knight of the Burning Pestle, give ear to me; there is twelve shillings
> to pay, and, as I am a true knight, I will not bate a penny. (3.149-161)

When his Wife fears that Rafe might be beaten, the Grocer hurriedly rises to intervene, paying

the character of the Host the required sum. Here again, the pair are evidently incapable of seeing

through the illusion of the performance, while Rafe, supposedly existing within the performance,

fails to decipher it correctly too (ironically, because he is so caught up in his own performance of

the Knight's adventures). The little interchange not only metatheatrically depicts how stage

illusion works but also serves to paint George and Nell as both materialistic and shallow.

Ironically, however, the depiction of the Citizen as an individual with money to spend

and display actually becomes metatheatrical in that it displays the nature of the Blackfriars

audience and of much Renaissance spectatorship. The act of George and Nell handing out money

to members of the troupe before them during the course of the play accurately mimics some elements of what was expected to occur in an early modern playhouse, again connecting them with the rest of the audience. As Thomas Platter (174-175; see Chapter Two) described seeing during a visit to the Curtain theater, the common convention for payment at both public and private theaters involved spectators paying a fixed price at the door and then, upon entrance, either choosing to remain in the cheapest seating (or, at the outdoor playhouses, standing) area or moving to others. As documents such as Henslowe's diary indicate, there were additional "admission fees to enter the galleries" (Carson 15), due to the improved quality of seating. Additional amenities, such as refreshments (provided while performances were underway), required more money to exchange hands. While George's payment of the player acting as the Host betokens a lack of imaginative understanding and asking for the shawms might make him a demanding spectator, he is only doing what other spectators around him (especially those that had paid the highest prices to be seated on stage) have already been engaged in. Considering that it is the money of spectators like him which kept theatrical companies (especially boys companies, which relied on smaller and richer audiences) functional, *The Knight*'s satire also seems at least slightly mean-spirited, and might have done so too to the original Blackfriars audience.

The fictional audience

The effect of the satire would likely have been quite different if there had been any variation in the fictional audience presented. It is likely not only the fact that Beaumont "laughed at ignorant playgoers who intervened in stage action because they forgot to distinguish stage and world" (Whitney 227) that skewed his original audience's response to *The Knight*, but rather that they were the only playgoers represented by the play. One may contrast Beaumont's approach

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with Ben Jonson's, whose works provide numerous examples analogous to elements of *The Knight*. In *Bartholomew Fair*, a play replete with metatheatrical elements, the Puritan Zeal-of-the-Land Busy constantly rails against the ills of performance. Finally, while viewing a puppet show at the eponymous fair, he uses what the puppet calls "your old stale argument against the players" (5.5.98), that it is an abomination because the puppets are cross-dressing. Busy is then "confuted" when the puppets raise their skirts to reveal their lack of sexual difference and relinquishes his cause, saying "I am changed, and will become a beholder with you!" (5.5.105, 108). Also present on stage at this moment are figures such as the disguised magistrate Adam Overdo, the simpleton Cokes, the cutpurse Edgeworth and Overdo's ward, Grace Wellborn, many of whom argue against Busy's rejection of theatricality well before he is discomfited. Jonson's drama outnumbers Busy with other fictional audience-members who have a better appreciation of drama. Busy's role as an anti-theatricalist Puritan also makes him a less likely member of the audience that watched *Bartholomew Fair* in performance than George and Nell at the Blackfriars. Such factors dramatically lowered the likelihood that most members of the audience to *Bartholomew Fair* would see the satirizing of Busy as a criticism of them.

For the Blackfriars audience to appreciate *The Knight*'s satiric treatment of George and Nell, the pair's uncritical acceptance of the fiction they see as reality needed to be seen as a flawed approach to theatre. They needed to see "the citizens' over-involvement in the illusion of the play as an education in how *not* to watch a play. What the citizens lack is irony, and the distance which irony affords" (Mousley 34). The same distance needs to exist between the real audience and George and Nell, in order for the satire to not be aimed at the former. However, the play's metatheatrically creative move of placing George and Nell on stage throughout its course, without any other fictional opposing viewpoints, further makes them representative of the

audience as a whole. As noted in Chapter 2, fictional audience-members and commenters on the action were a common occurrence in Renaissance drama. They were, however, rarely to be taken as completely incapable of understanding the play before them and, if to be taken as examples of poor judgment, usually had companions who either corrected them or displayed a wiser viewpoint. The Ghost in *The Spanish Tragedy* fails to clearly comprehend what he sees, but Revenge is present to better inform him (and, by extension, the theater audience). In *Every Man out of his Humour*, Jonson places two critics on stage (seemingly seated among the gentry like George and Nell), but where Mitis has little judgment and is easily swayed, Cordatus has consistently fine discernment and is there to correct him. Not adding a dissenting voice on stage allowed *The Knight* to better fabricate its fiction of an impromptu performance occurring at the whims of the Citizen and his Wife (and saved the troupe an additional two shilling seat, which was probably at least somewhat of a factor), but it also caused issues in the nature and effect of the satiric depiction of the pair of fictional spectators, issues which the play's original audience evidently noticed.

An argument may be made that the real audience on stage with the Citizen and his Wife, the "gentlemen" sitting near them, should have furnished the counterpoint to their perspectives that other fictional audience-members could have provided. That, however, would require the perspectives of the other stage-sitters to be both different from George and Nell's and explicit to the offstage audience, neither of which was certain to occur. Furthermore, the presence of two fictionalized obstreperous spectators could easily have been perceived by the "gentlemen" as a satiric attack on them, since those sitting on stage were regularly criticized as disruptive by playwrights and others (see Chapter 2). Just as Dekker satirized them in *The Gull's Hornbook*, so too do others such as John Davies, mocking "Rufus the Courtier" who sits on stage to display

himself to the audience. The preface to the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays complained of those who think that "you be a Magistrate of wit, and sit on the Stage at Black-Friers, or the Cock-pit, to arraigne Playes dailie." It was evidently considered enough of a nuisance to lead "the king in person to ban sitting on the stage at the smallest of the hall playhouses in 1639" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 19). Hence, despite the aforementioned attempts of the Boy to rhetorically separate George and Nell from the gentlemen, the latter could reasonably have seen them as a veiled criticism of all stage-sitters.

Above all, the comprehensive nature of *The Knight*'s deployment of metatheatricality actually works against the satire seemingly aimed at George and Nell, making the play's criticism of the two expansive enough to apply to the audience at large. Gurr, as previously noted, argues that the play failed because it was wrongly perceived as a pro-citizen play. I would consider it rather an anti-spectator (or pro-playwright/player) play. Through the actions of the Citizen and his Wife, *The Knight* depicts some of the difficulties that playwrights and players faced during the Renaissance, having their choices criticized, their stagecraft interfered with, and their performances disrupted by obstreperously demanding spectators. Similarly, the seeming adaptability of the troupe to the fictionalized audience's commands and interference becomes a display of virtuosity, allowing them to show off their theatrical skills. In the metatheatrical world depicted by *The Knight*, there is little positive to say about the spectators, a fact that might have easily alienated many members of its audience.

Audience imagination

As part of its criticism of George and Nell, *The Knight* provides a detailed metatheatrical recreation of the experience of Renaissance playgoing. Over the course of the play, it depicts sees "virtually every aspect of a playgoer's theatrical experience in early modern London,

especially at the indoor theaters" (Thomson 61). Whether it be the references to other plays, the seating on stage, the use of music, the conversation between Acts, or the use of money in the theater, all that George and Nell experience is what real theatergoers would see at the theater, especially in a private playhouse. This too serves to make the two representative members of the audience, paradoxically heightening the play's deployment of metatheatricality while working against its satiric aims. Intriguingly, even in the area where they are probably most thoroughly criticized (implicitly by *The Knight* and explicitly by many scholars), namely in the exercise of their imagination as spectators, the Citizen and his Wife strongly share the experiences of their fellow audience members.

An illustrative example is provided by one of the most fascinatingly metatheatrical of episodes in the play, namely Rafe's aforementioned experience at the Bell Inn and his battle upon leaving it, which stretches across two Acts. After having been beaten by Jasper, Rafe (the errant Knight of the Burning Pestle) travels on with his squire Tim and the dwarf George. Mistress Merrythought and her son Michael, whom he met on the way, also accompany the Knight. At this point, Rafe's two attendants provide the following information:

> *Tim.* Why, we are at Waltham town's end, and that's the Bell Inn.
> *George.* Take courage, valiant knight, damsel, and squire.
> I have discovered, not a stone's cast off,
> An ancient castle, held by the old knight
> Of the most holy order of the Bell,
> Who gives to all knights-errant entertain.
> There plenty is of food, and all prepared
> By the white hands of his own lady dear.
> He hath three squires that welcome all his guests:
> The first hight Chamberlino, who will see
> Our beds prepared, and bring us snowy sheets,
> Where never footman stretched his buttered hams;
> The second hight Tapstero, who will see
> Our pots full fillèd and no froth therein.
> The third, a gentle squire, Ostlero hight,
> Who will our palfreys slick with wisps of straw,

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> And in the manger put them oats enough,
> And never grease their teeth with candle-snuff. (2.361-379)

Rafe, staying utterly in character (as he does throughout his various performances), treats the encounter as George describes it, asking Tim, "Knock at the gates, my squire, with stately lance" (2.381). The scene is at first glance simply satiric. George's grandiose description of what is evidently only a humble and recognizable English inn and his transformation of the chamberlain, tapster and ostler into the romantically named Chamberlino, Tapstero and Ostlero, serve to parody the events found commonly in romances. The mockery also applies, by extension, to the Citizen and his Wife (and Rafe), who evidently enjoy such fare. However, while the reference to the romance genre may function as effective satire, the scene's metatheatrical elements arguably lead to a different effect.

The scene's parodic effect relies, in part, on the dramatic contrast between Tim's lines and George's. However, both of them are doing effectively the same thing, imaginatively and verbally constructing a structure on stage which does not exist in reality. Facing the tiring house, Tim describes it as the Bell Inn and George as an ancient castle but, of course, it is actually neither. On the relatively bare Renaissance stage, it is the actor's words and actions that explicate what the staged location and situation are. When Horatio says, "But, look, the morn in russet mantle clad, / Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill" (1.1.166-167) or Banquo and Fleance enter with a torch, Banquo asking, "How goes the night, boy?" (2.1.1), they require the active imaginative agreement of the audience for the situation to occur. Even if Tim is accurate and George is not (as the subsequent appearance and words of the Tapster indicate), both of their identifications of the location rely strongly on the audience to function. If Rafe, the Citizen and his Wife are figures of fun because they imagine that they see what does not exist before them based on the words of others, so too could be any member of the early modern audience.

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That is especially true in the case of this scene, since there is an extended metatheatrical joke at play. The boys companies sometimes "seem to have hung up title boards in the private playhouses" (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 221). This evidently occurred in *The Knight*, with the Citizen original complaining about the intended play, "and now you call your play *The London Merchant*. Down with your title, boy; down with your title!" (1.8-9). Now, Rafe and those with him stand before the title board hanging on the tiring house, treating it as if it bears the sign of the Bell Inn (since the dwarf George and the squire Tim agree that they see the Bell but interpret it differently). The issue of theatrical imagination is made explicit by the overt disjunction between what is seen and how it is described and interpreted. This particular joke of seeing and interpreting actually extends across Acts. When leaving the inn, Rafe asks about the possibility for "sad adventures … Where errant knight may through his prowess win / Eternal fame and free some gentle souls" (3.211-213). His Host informs him about "a cave / In which an ugly giant now doth won / Yclepèd Barboroso" (3.233-235). According to the Host, one may recognize the giant's cave by the fact that outside "his door doth hang / A copper basin on a prickant spear" (3.240-241), which a knight can knock against to draw out Barboroso. This description again parodies the popular romances with their giants and evil knights, but there is an added layer of representation here. Barboroso (as the pun in his name indicates) is actually "Nick the Barber" (3.215), whom the Host has secretly sent the Tapster to warn of Rafe's approach. Evidently, the audience now realizes, the copper basin and spear are not those of a giant but a barbershop pole with a ball atop it (its colors representing blood-letting and dentistry, while the ball was a stylized version of the basin used in blood-letting). Rafe, of course, is unaware of the fact. So too, despite having seen the Host send off the Tapster, are the Citizen and his Wife, Nell asking worriedly, "George, dost think Rafe will confound the giant?" (3.270). Minutes later, Rafe will

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stand before the tiring house and its sign that he recently saw as the castle of the knight of the

Bell, now viewing them as a giant's cave with his spear outside, and proceed to duel the giant. In

the eyes of the Blackfriars audience, however, he is fighting a barber outside his shop. George

and Nell's views align with Rafe's, of course, adding to their positions as figures of mockery.

However, as noted, the active imagination that they display in seeing what does not exist before

them is functionally very similar to that which the true Blackfriars spectators evince, since what

they watch is in reality neither giant nor barber, but simply an actor.

The multilayered meaning of the scene becomes even more complex because Beaumont

at this point indulges himself in even more parody of the citizens. After Rafe defeats the barber,

Tim and George actually find multiple captives in the cave. The first freed prisoner identifies

himself as a knight suffering from "the itch" (3.377), which could refer to lice or a skin disease

but implies a sexual disease too. The second has "a patch o'er his nose" and is called "Sir

Pockhole by name," a Londoner but whose "ancestors / Were Frenchman all" (3.389-398). The

description indicates that he is in an advanced stage of syphilis (called French pox in England),

since the rotting of the nose was a symptom that was popularly referenced with amusement.

These references are clearly intended to mock the Citizen and his Wife in view of the fact that

they are represented by the Knight of the Burning Pestle. The name, which was actually

suggested by the irritated Prologue (Induction 93) after their insistence on Rafe acting in the

play, is a reference to a phallus infected with venereal disease. However, while the appearance of

these captives does serve to further mock Nell and George, it also serves to suddenly make their

imagination the correct one. The purported barber Nick has now been converted back into an

actual giant of romance, with captive knights in his cave, just as the Citizens and Rafe had

imagined him to be. The active imaginative leap which the Blackfriars audience has to make at

this discovery aligns them even more closely with the fictional pair representing them on stage. While George and Nell may suffer from too great a suspension of disbelief, lacking the self-awareness that was the norm for early modern audiences, their exercise of imagination is strongly related to that which the real spectators use. The play's mockery of them for the manner in which they exercise their imagination, thus, could also be interpreted as a criticism of the Blackfriars spectatorship in general, adding one more possible reason for their rejection of *The Knight*.

Conclusion

In the end, the failure of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, despite being (in its sustained and sophisticated metatheatrical exploration of the nature of dramatic performance and spectatorship) a perfect exemplar of Renaissance dramaturgy, was not occasioned simply by the audience's inability to comprehend it. Rather, the play's deployment of metatheater and its eventual failure both derive from the heavily contested nature of the early modern stage and the continuing battle between playwrights and players, on one hand, and audiences and critics, on the other, to control what appeared on such stages. The active and self-aware audience of the time, seeing fictional spectators who were just as engaged as their real compatriots but mocked for a lack of awareness (especially since the lack was illustrated largely through divergences between their perspective and that of the players), could easily have interpreted the play as a criticism of them and, resultantly, rejected it.

The play's original failure is particularly ironic since it appears to celebrate the victory of the playwright and the players. So at least is the common critical consensus, many scholars arguing that though "the play displays and examines different kinds of control, these controls are all subject to the control that the theater has over the fiction it presents. Those who do the

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playing occupy a space that here celebrates its own freedom" (Dillon 108). Certainly, the

brilliant metatheatrical pyrotechnics of *The Knight* provide vivid evidence of the dramatic

possibilities of early modern theatre, especially its ability to depict multiple interweaving layers

of illusion and reality and the connection between theatre and the world beyond it. However, the

play also clearly displays the fact that the potentiality of the Renaissance stage derived from and

led to its nature as a space where multiple forces competed. In *The Knight*, the "essential action

is, literally, a continual battle between the players and the 'citizens' for possession of the stage,"

which arguably ends in a sort of theatrical compromise:

> The child players, old professionals that they are, eventually manage to present the play
> that they have promised their audience but only after enduring blatant interruptions from
> bullying, uncomprehending, vulgar, impolite intruders who, in their turn, get their
> money's worth by interpolating a running commentary on whatever strikes their fancy
> and by forcing onto the stage a play of their own 'impromptu' devising. (Finkelpearl 83)

Certainly, by the end of *The Knight*, the Grocer and his Wife seem much more pleased with what

they have seen than they were originally or, arguably, at any previous juncture. Nell's closing

response is especially representative of the shift. When George says, "Come, Nell, shall we go?

The play's done" (Epilogue 1), her response transforms the Grocer's wife into the traditional

epilogue, who requests audience applause to signal a successful end to the performance:

> *Wife*. Nay, by my faith, George, I have more manners than so; I'll speak to these
> gentlemen first.—I thank you all, gentlemen, for your patience and countenance to Ralph,
> a poor fatherless child; and if I might see you at my house, it should go hard but I would
> have a bottle of wine and a pipe of tobacco for you: for, truly, I hope you do like the
> youth, but I would be glad to know the truth; I refer it to your own discretions, whether
> you will applaud him or no; for I will wink, and whilst you shall do what you will. I
> thank you with all my heart. God give you good night!—Come, George. (Epilogue 2-12)

Here, at the play's end, Nell has accepted all that was performed for her and now assumes a role

that is not at all disruptive, delivering the traditional closing speech which should unite players

and spectators in harmony. Ironically, of course, even if Nell's words are intended to be taken as

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further proof of the players' success by the end of *The Knight*, that is not true of the historical

reality. The original audience was not to be so easily swayed. By the time the play was revived,

Beaumont was long dead and its greatest successes occurred centuries after his passing, when

performed before audiences and under conditions which would have been utterly alien to those

for which it was composed and which it dramatized.

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