

# 4

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## The theatre of Shakespeare's London

### Actors

Hamlet, excited at having just successfully extemporized a verse, turns to his friend Horatio, asking 'Would not this ... get me a fellowship in a cry of players, sir?' Horatio is less impressed. He thinks it would win Hamlet only 'half a share', but Hamlet is adamant: 'A whole one, I' (3.2.253–7). The exchange works on a number of levels. Hamlet is delighted that he has the improvisational skill of an actor; the irony is, of course, that Hamlet is actually able to 'act' only in this performative sense, while in reality, as he recognizes elsewhere, he can merely 'unpack my heart with words' (2.2.563). But the conversation also references the structure of an early modern acting company. 'Cries' or troupes were set up by 'sharers' who contributed to them two separate but equally important qualities: acting talent and money. Thus Hamlet thinks his skills alone should earn him a 'share' in a company, while Horatio thinks they merit only half that right.

Shakespeare himself was a full 'sharer' in a company known first as the Lord Chamberlain's Men (1594–6; 1597–1603) and later as the King's Men (1603–1642). This meant that Shakespeare was bound to be performance-focused, for it was at the end of a day's playing that the money taken at the doors of entrance was 'parcel'd out upon the sharing-board' – placed upon a table and distributed among the sharers.<sup>1</sup> And, as theatrical income was specifically linked to performance, then if plague closed the theatre, or fire destroyed it, Shakespeare would make no money, and nor would anyone else. So there was seldom any 'spare' money in the theatre – which explains why no performers were provided who did not act (there were no understudies), no conceptualizers were acquired who did not organize performances (there were no directors, only prompters) and few theatrical activities took place for which there was no financial return (there seems to have been very little in the way of group rehearsal).

Sharers sometimes kept and trained apprentices: young boy players to whom they taught the art of acting. As 'playing' was not a formalized

profession, an actor who wanted apprentices had to acquire and maintain membership of a professional guild as, for example, a grocer, goldsmith or carpenter; he would then technically take on apprentices in his trade, though he would in fact teach them to act. So John Heminges, one of the actors responsible for the publication of Shakespeare's First Folio, took on a number of apprentice 'grocers' during his acting career.<sup>2</sup> These apprentices performed not just the roles of boys like Mote in *Love's Labour's Lost* and Arthur in *King John*, but also those of women, a fact that leads to a certain amount of metatheatrical jesting on Shakespeare's part. When Cleopatra imagines how she will one day be represented on stage, she fears to 'see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I'th' posture of a whore' (5.2.215–18), a line that derives its humour and ironic poignancy from the fact that it will indeed be spoken by a boy.

Though 'hirelings' – players paid by the week – were sometimes acquired, scenes were, when possible, simply swollen with non-speaking characters ('mutes') performed by people already working for the troupe: 'gatherers', who collected entrance money from the audience, and 'tiremen', who helped dress the actors backstage. Hamlet views the silent onlookers of his tragedy as 'but mutes or audience to this act' (5.2.277); earlier in the play 'genuine' mutes have been requested by a stage direction which asks '*The poisoner, with some two or three mutes*' to '[*come*] in again' (3.2.122 SD). It is sometimes suggested that Shakespeare's habit of increasing the number and complexity of his crowd scenes towards the latter half of his plays reveals the fact that more 'mute' actors are available when the gatherers have completed their job.<sup>3</sup>

As Shakespeare wrote largely for a group of actors whom he knew well, he shaped his characterizations to the skills of his colleagues. For this reason, he regularly repeats character types. The fool with a beautiful singing voice, for instance, is to be found in several of his plays – he is Touchstone in *As You Like It*, Feste in *Twelfth Night* and the wise Fool in *King Lear*, because Shakespeare is writing for Robert Armin (c. 1563–1615), an actor, lute-player, singer and professional fool, who joined the company in 1600. A new verse for Armin's 'clown' song sung at the end of *Twelfth Night*, with its chorus of 'the rain it raineth every day' (5.1.376–95), is provided for the Fool to sing in *King Lear* (3.2.72–5), suggesting that Shakespeare makes a positive effort to link both roles. One play, that is to say, gains resonance from its gesture towards another: *Lear* and *Twelfth Night* share a moment of tragic vision with each other and with the knowing spectators in ways that confound distinctions between comedy and tragedy. Other roles that he wrote are also clearly shaped to the skills of a single actor, and, again, the connections between such roles erode the separation between one play and

another. A talkative and gullible old man who thinks he is smarter than he is can be seen in Polonius (*Hamlet*), Brabantio (*Othello*), Duncan (*Macbeth*) and Menenius (*Coriolanus*); an attractive, wily, charismatic villain appears as Iago (*Othello*), Edmund (*King Lear*) and Iachimo (*Cymbeline*). As soon as an actor with a known range of roles stepped onto the stage, then, he brought with him elements from the other characters he had played that Shakespeare could manipulate and complicate.

Though the term 'typecasting' was not to come into use until the twentieth century, the repeated characters written for a regular group of performers with individually identifiable skills suggests the very way Shakespeare conceived of a theatrical company. When Hamlet meets a group of players, he knows from experience what part each will play, though he has not seen them perform for a year: one is 'He that plays the King' (2.2.308); another is 'the adventurous Knight' (2.2.309). He identifies the type of each member of the group in front of him, joshing 'the lady' that 'she' has grown taller over the last year (2.2.408–10); he even guesses at the stories that will attend on the players:

the Lover shall not sigh gratis, the Humorous Man shall end his part in peace,  
the Clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickled o'th' sear, and the  
Lady shall say her mind freely. (2.2.310–13)

Hardly surprisingly, when Shakespeare created roles it was with a limited number of character types in mind, representative of the acting skills of his company. His texts in the form in which they were first printed often alternate, in speech prefixes and stage directions, between using a generic name (like 'Queen') and a character name (like 'Gertrude'), suggesting that Shakespeare probably wrote for 'types' found in his troupe and individualized them only later. Instances of 'types' in more than one play include 'braggart' (referred to in the 1603 *Hamlet* as an alternative title for 'Osric' and in *Love's Labour's Lost* as an alternative title for Don Adriano) and 'Old man' (the title for Leonato's brother in *Much Ado About Nothing* and for the person who accompanies the newly blinded Gloucester in *King Lear*). Sometimes only the type is ever supplied, explaining 'names' such as 'Nurse' in *Romeo and Juliet* and 'Fool' in *Lear*.<sup>4</sup>

Different plays were put on every day in the early modern theatre: hence the commotion when Middleton's politically provocative *A Game at Chess* was performed for an unprecedented nine days in a row. As a result, actors needed to have a method for putting on up to forty plays (some old, several new) in a season, with minimal preparation. Sharers in a company would hear a reading of a new play given by its author, partly to decide whether or not to accept the text, and partly to learn the tale it told; so they – but not

other actors – did at least know the story in which they were to feature and the staging issues it raised. After that, they would each be given texts known as ‘parts’ or ‘rolls’ containing the speeches they were to speak, each speech preceded by a ‘cue’ of one to three words. No actor received a full copy of the play, because paper and scribes were prohibitively expensive. These ‘parts’ of plays would then be learnt by heart, a process known as ‘study’ or sometimes, when a helper was involved, ‘instruction’. This is fictionalized by Shakespeare, whose mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* prepare their play in ways remarkably similar to those described in account books of the period. Just as in York the actors would ‘haue ther partes fair wrytten & delyuered theym [in tyme] soo that they may haue leysure to kurne [learn] euery one his part’, so in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* actors are given their parts (‘here are your parts’) but are issued with strict instructions to ‘con them by tomorrow night’ before they meet to rehearse (1.2.82); after this they have only one brief and unfinished collective rehearsal before they put on the performance itself.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, the part was a very important unit of a play, for it was the text that actors knew best; their characterizations were created by working outward from their individual lines and cues rather than from the narrative. In ‘study’ and ‘instruction’ alike, actors would read their parts looking to identify their ‘passions’ and to isolate the particular transitional moment when one ‘passion’ yielded to another. So important were the passions to playing that the poet and divine Samuel Nicholson asks an actor, ‘Tell me whose person did you passionate?’ Acting at the time was even sometimes called ‘passionating’, and when Hamlet wants to have ‘a taste’ of a player’s ‘quality’, it is ‘a passionate speech’ (2.2.414) that he demands.<sup>6</sup> So one reason Shakespeare’s speeches involve such abrupt switches of emotion – Macbeth’s ‘Is this a dagger?’ speech shifts over a few lines from confused mental torment to purposeful resolution, ‘I go, and it is done’ (2.1.62) – is to allow the players to illustrate their skills at transitioning from one passion to another.

Once isolated, the passions also needed to be manifested in themselves, as did other more technical features of the writing: the verse and the prose, the rhetorical tropes, the pauses. For all of this, actors needed to decide which words in their text to choose and emphasize (in the language of the time, to determine their ‘pronunciation’) and which telling gestures to use to accompany them (in the language of the time, to determine their ‘action’). When Polonius (*Hamlet*) says that the player’s text has been ‘well spoken, with good accent and good discretion’ (2.2.446–7), he is praising the actor’s choice of verbal and gestural emphasis; when Titus (*Titus Andronicus*) laments, ‘How can I grace my talk, / Wanting a hand to give it action’, he is

bemoaning the fact that, having cut off one of his hands, he is incapable of illustrating his lamentation with the proper gestures (5.2.17–18).

Though technicalities of production were rehearsed *en masse*, generally under the auspices of the prompter – who was in charge of the practical side of performance – there is no indication that sharers were concerned with the narrative arc of a play; hirelings, unlikely to have attended ‘readings’, certainly were not.<sup>7</sup> But in many ways this was positive, for actors became focused on their characters as created by the words they spoke rather than by context. A potentially tragic character, like Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, might not be conscious of the fact – and so would not play the fact – that the story around him is a comedy, allowing for a broader range of interpretation within a single play than is often found today. This also goes some way towards explaining Shakespeare's ability to create individual characters with their own habits of rhetoric: Hamlet's confusion of ‘soul’ and ‘mind’ is a particular character note, speaking of his over-rationalized, yet religiously murky world – ‘Since my dear Soule was mistress of her choice’ (3.2.56); ‘it offends me to the soul’ (3.2.7–8). For Shakespeare, separate parts would have constituted a vital way of conceiving of a text in the first place: he was an actor who wrote in the knowledge that his plays, like all plays, would be disseminated in part-form; he constructed his texts accordingly.

## Theatres

London was a small, walled city and could not, until the late sixteenth century, supply enough theatre-loving people to make up a daily audience for a permanent playhouse. Only in 1567 was a fixed theatre, the Red Lion, constructed, and it did not last long. But everything changed in 1576 when an enormous round theatre, called ‘the Theatre’, was built in Shoreditch (just outside the city walls) by the ex-actor and entrepreneur James Burbage. The Theatre, with its shape and name gesturing towards a classicism that the wood and thatch of the structure scarcely merited, was to stand for over twenty years; it was so successful that copies of it sprang up around the city.

One of several reasons for the popularity of the Theatre was James Burbage's talented family. His son Cuthbert was an excellent manager and theatre-keeper; his son Richard was a superb actor. Shakespeare, who started writing for the Theatre in about 1594, originally penned many of his star roles for the ‘delightful Proteus’ (the god of shape-shifting) Richard Burbage, who was famous for his spectacular acting range; these were played so masterfully that when Richard died it was assumed that the plays written for

him had died too. As an elegy lamented, ‘young Hamlet, old Hieronimo / kind Lear, the greivèd Moor, and more beside, / that lived in him have now for ever died’.<sup>8</sup>

Much of London was in the hands of puritans, so all playhouses, the Theatre included, were constructed in areas known as ‘the Liberties’ which were outside the jurisdiction of the lord mayor and not bound by London laws. Some Liberties were sites of former monasteries within the city, but most were outside the London walls or opposite them on the south side of the Thames. Indeed, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men found themselves moving from the northern Liberty that housed the Theatre to the Liberty of Southwark on the south bank of the Thames in 1599.<sup>9</sup> This was because their entire playhouse had to be relocated. The Theatre had been built on a rented field; so when the owner of the field decided not to let his property any longer, the company found themselves without legal access to the site of their stage. The moment seared itself in Shakespeare’s memory, for in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* he has Ford describe misplaced love as ‘a fair house built on another man’s ground, so that I have lost my edifice by mistaking the place where I erected it’ (2.2.193–4). The company’s solution, as legal records attest, was forcibly to enter the field they no longer owned and to pull down their theatre: they conveyed it over the Thames for re-use on the other side.<sup>10</sup> During the next year, the Globe playhouse was built from the Theatre’s remains – perhaps re-using the slatted sides that made it up, or perhaps simply plundering its wood.

While waiting for the Globe to be completed, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men moved to another round theatre, the Curtain, which had been constructed some years earlier in the Theatre’s environs. Perhaps *Henry V*, with its stress on the smallness and meanness of the stage – ‘Can this cock-pit hold / The vasty fields of France?’ (Prologue 111–12) – was first performed here as the company waited with increasing urgency for the completion of their glamorous new playhouse.

The attraction of Southwark, attested to by the fact that other public theatres, the Rose and the Swan, had already been built there, was that the area had a well-established reputation for light-hearted entertainment. Once a year Southwark Fair was held there, so that for centuries the Bankside had housed temporary booths for puppet shows, performing animals, rope-dancers and, of course, plays. But the Liberty, opposite London, yet visible from it, and easily accessible by boat or London Bridge, had over time become known for hosting more dubious pleasures. It was to this place that a Londoner would resort for a day’s drinking – the area abounded in alehouses – or bear-baiting, or paid sex. Thus playhouses settling in Southwark chose a context that simultaneously enhanced and threatened their livelihood: Globe plays

often refer to bear-baiting (Olivia in *Twelfth Night* says that Viola/Cesario has 'set mine honour at the stake / And baited it with all th'unmuzzled thoughts / That tyrannous heart can think' (3.1.110–12)) and whores and bawdy-houses (in *Measure for Measure* Pompey is 'a Bawd, a wicked bawd' (2.1.274)) because they are rivalling, by subsuming, some of the other surrounding entertainments. It was sensible, too, for playhouses themselves to offer as many of the pleasures of Southwark as possible, which would have provided ironic context to the dramas that critiqued them. Both bottled ale and women seem to have been readily available at most playhouses. A nervous playwright 'when he hears his play hissed ... would rather think bottle-ale is opening', writes John Stephens; the puritanical William Prynne holds that 'our common strumpets and adulteresses after our stage-plays ended, are oft-times prostituted near our play-houses, if not in them'.<sup>11</sup>

The movement from Theatre to Globe as one playhouse mutates into the other works its way into Shakespeare's plays too. In *As You Like It*, which is often thought to have been Shakespeare's first Globe play, the Duke describes life as being like a (or the) Theatre: 'This wide and universal theatre / Presents more woeful pageants than the scene / Wherein we play in' (2.7.136–8) ('scene', here, means both 'stage' and the action performed on that stage). Jaques continues the analogy but repositions the statement: 'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players...' (2.7.138–9) – which is to say, more particularly, that the Theatre is now the Globe.

Round theatres of the period had a structure that, itself, became part of the plays performed inside them. They contained stages that 'thrust' into the middle of the building, around which was space for a standing audience. Thus the audience nearest the stage were also the people who paid least – standing cost just a penny; they are regularly insulted in the plays of the period, being known as 'penny stinkards', 'groundlings' (because they stood on the ground) or 'understanders' (because they stood lower than the raised stage). Shakespeare directly taunts the standing audience in moments when his characters refer to crowds with crowd mentalities: 'What's the matter, you dissentious rogues, / That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion, / Make yourselves scabs' (*Coriolanus*, 1.1.153–5); he also rouses them when he wants an external mass of people like the army in *Henry V* ('Cry, "God for Harry! England and Saint George!"') (3.1.34).

Over the stage was an internal roof that protected the clothes of the actors and aided with the amplification of their voices. Known as 'Heaven', it seems to have been decorated with signs of the night sky. Hamlet refers to the actual heavens, but simultaneously to this space, when he speaks of 'brave o'erhanging, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.291–2). Under the stage was an area known as 'Hell'; so when actors used the trap

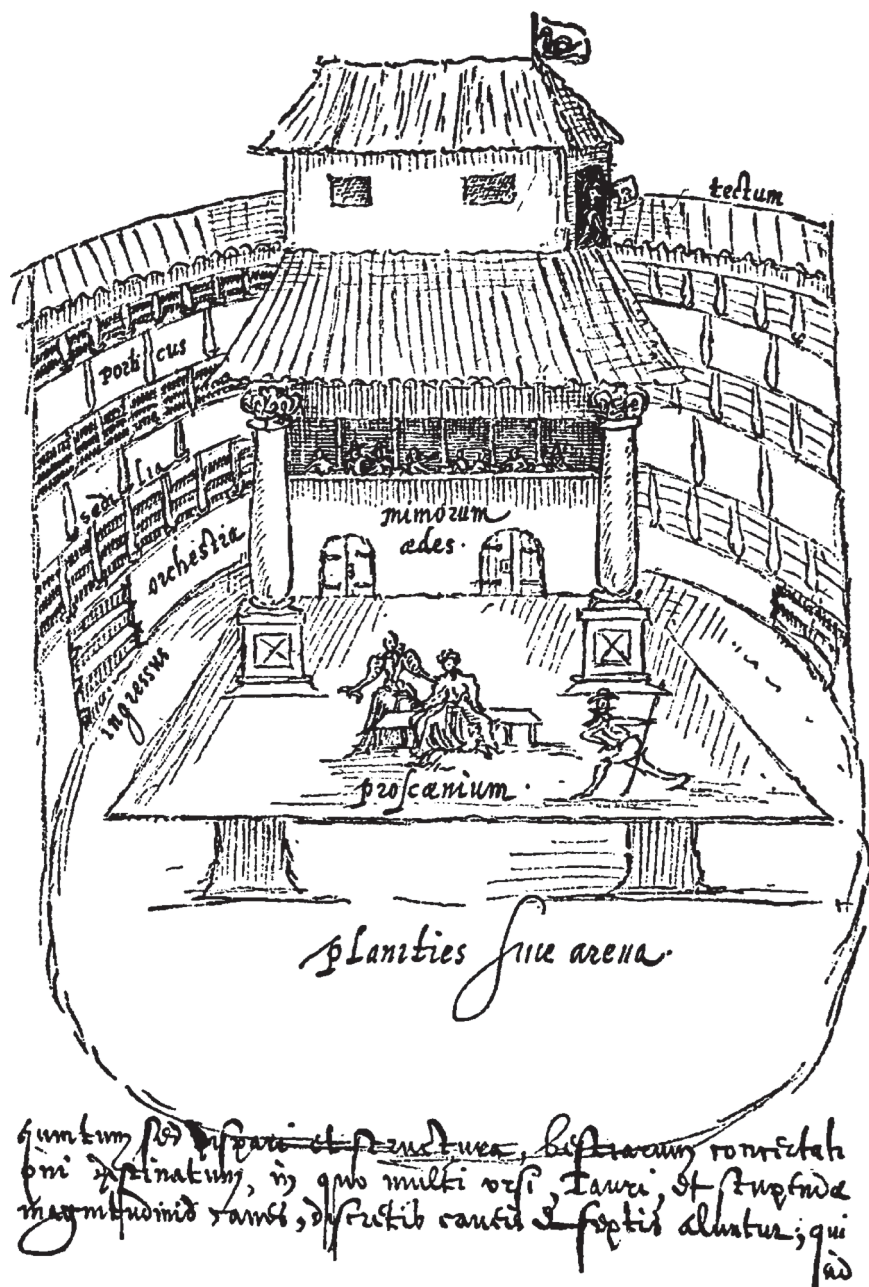


door to go up to or down from the stage, the audience would be acutely conscious of the fact that characters were entering or exiting a demonic region. Thus when Hamlet questions whether the ghost he has seen has really been his dead father or is actually an evil spirit, a 'goblin damned' (1.4.21), the audience will have had an answer. The ghost, having exited, repeatedly cries out from what Hamlet describes as 'the cellarage' (1.5.153) under the stage; he is called 'old mole' (1.5.164), reminding the observers that he burrows under the surface on which Hamlet stands. Every effort is made, that is to say, to remind the audience that the ghost is situated under the stage in 'Hell'. Hence the disposition of the stage could be used to give indications to the audience of which the characters in the fiction of the story are unaware.

A couple of pillars supported the weight of the Heavens, attaching the area to the stage. They existed for practical reasons, but naturally made their way into the drama too. They were probably used as the trees in *As You Like It* on which poems to 'Rosalind' are hung; they would also have provided convenient onstage 'hiding places' that allowed characters to be 'invisible' from other players but visible to the audience. Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* is likely to have sheltered here where the audience could watch her face as her friends 'discuss' Benedick's love for her. But the pillars could also be used as stage-dividers: there were two of them, just as there were two doors to the left and right of the stage for entrances (between them was an aperture for 'discoveries') which collectively split the stage into separate areas. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, for instance, Egypt and Rome are staged in close succession, but a combination of doors and pillars will have allowed one side of the stage to 'become' the one, and the other side of the stage to 'become' the other.

On top of all round theatres was a flagpole on which, in advance of performance, colourful ensigns were hung. These signified that a play was soon to begin; they were visible from a great distance and were embellished with signs directly related to the theatre they represented. The flag of the Rose showed a star-like rose (hence an early map that calls the Rose 'the starre'), the flag of the Swan showed a swan, as de Witt's contemporary drawing illustrates (see Figure 1), while the flag for the Globe seems to have depicted Atlas or Hercules holding the globe on his shoulders. This means that any reference to Hercules, Atlas or the Globe in a play written for performance in that theatre becomes metatheatrical too. When Antony's god, Hercules, 'now leaves him' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 4.3.13–14), the very stage has given up on its hero; more literally, when the players in *Hamlet* say that 'an eyrie of children' (2.2.326) are winning audiences over 'Hercules and his load' (2.2.345), they are addressing a current problem that was besetting the King's Men: performances by boy actors were more popular than performances by the adult players at the Globe.





1 The Swan playhouse, Aernout van Buchel, copy of drawing by Jan de Witt, 1596.

In addition to the round (or sometimes square) large public theatres were the smaller, more intimate and pricier private theatres. They were often in Liberties within the city walls, like Blackfriars or Whitefriars; they were more acceptable than public theatres.<sup>12</sup> For a long time, for instance, choir-boys and talented schoolboys performed in private theatres using the claim that they were not lowly professional actors, but scholars putting on productions (for which an audience had to pay) as part of their education. Private theatres had a number of advantages over public ones: they were enclosed rather than open to the elements; they were well lit by candles (so performances did not have to happen only in daylight hours); and they were comfortable (seats were provided for everyone) and well heated. As a result, private theatres could charge considerably higher prices for entrance than public theatres. This meant that they attracted a slightly different kind of audience: one that was richer and more educated, with higher expectations for their entertainment. The preoccupations of such an audience tended to be taken up in the plays written for them.

Given that Shakespeare changed the nature of his playwriting around 1608 – the time when his company was finally granted the right to perform in a private theatre, the Blackfriars – the physical playhouse, its stage and audience seem to have affected his style. Certainly he started writing plays in a five-act structure from roughly this time onwards (before that he had written plays in a series of scenes rather than acts), which may relate to the indoor theatre's need for regular breaks so that the candles could be trimmed. He also started adding courtly entertainments into his dramas, perhaps to appeal to an audience who wished to replicate court habits. There are masques in *Henry VIII*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* that are cut-down versions of the court masques of their day. The slightly magical properties of Shakespeare's late plays, too, can be traced to qualities supplied by the indoor theatre: yellow candlelight, perfumed air (smells, which lingered in an enclosed space, were used as part of performance – in *Pericles*, Thaisa's coffin 'smells / Most sweetly' (12.58–9); Innogen's breath 'perfumes the chamber' in *Cymbeline* (2.2.19)), cloying smoke from wicks and tobacco, and a bejewelled, highly visible audience (one poet writes of a suit that 'glistered at the torchy [Black]Friars').<sup>13</sup>

### Playgoers

Playgoers of the early modern period could come from any class and walk of life if they could scrape together the money to pay for entrance. John Taylor the Waterpoet writes of the beggar who, at the Bankside, is able 'with his many / [to] Come in at a play-house, all in for one penny': public playhouses attracted

a wide social range – though as their performances started at two o'clock in the afternoon, working men could only attend if they had time off, or if it were a holiday.<sup>14</sup> Private theatres, which charged considerably more – the cheapest seats cost sixpence – attracted a better-educated audience; court performances were in front of royalty and members of the nobility; touring productions were, like public theatre plays, performed in front of anyone prepared to pay to see them. So Shakespeare had to write for all sorts of people, and his immense literary range, from slapstick to deep tragedy, may well stem from the fact that he is targeting specific groups with different forms of writing.

Whatever walk of life they came from, with no numbered seating in any kind of theatre and no way of securing advance ownership of a particular space, spectators needed to turn up well in advance of performance to 'save' good places for themselves. To occupy the time, it was usual to arrive at the theatre with portable entertainments, particularly books. Dekker instructs a 'gull' to carry *The Guls Hornbook* to the playhouse; there he is to 'draw forth this book, read aloud [and] laugh aloud'.<sup>15</sup> Books were even sold at theatres. Blade in Cowley's *The Guardian* (4.3) tells Dogrel that if he is not careful his job will be to 'make and sell small pamphlets i'the playhouse'; Parrot begs the book-seller that his *The Mastive* be not 'at play-houses, 'mongst pippins sold'.<sup>16</sup> So the theatre was a place where the audience met literature first in book and then in performance form, suggesting that they may have perceived a close relationship between the two. Audiences also learnt of plays in print before they saw them in performance (all playbills were printed); the close connection between performance and publication, often questioned now, was visible then and situated directly around and inside the playhouses themselves.

Literate members of the theatre audience also responded to plays in a bookish fashion. Spectators would take writing equipment to the playhouse to note down the passages they liked. 'I am one that hath seen this play often', Webster makes Sly say; 'I have most of the jests here in my table-book'.<sup>17</sup> When Hamlet says, 'My tables – meet it is I set it down, / That one may smile and smile and be a villain', he means that 'one may smile and smile and be a villain' is worth recording in his erasable notebook ('tables') (1.5.108–9); he jests darkly at the audience members who are doing just that.<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare would also be pleased that audiences captured and circulated his lines, for that would act as a form of advertisement for him, his plays and his theatre. He made an effort to give spectators 'extractable' passages for their tables, 'sententiae', as well as plenty of new words that they could take home as gifts (the theatre was famous as 'the mint that daily coins new words').<sup>19</sup> Over 500 coinages are attributed to Shakespeare in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and when he pokes fun at word-gatherers, it is with a cruel consciousness that they

are some of his greatest admirers. ‘Remuneration’, he has Costard the clown say in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, having misunderstood the meaning of the term, ‘I will never buy and sell out of this word’ (3.1.125, 129–30).

Spectators who attended first performances, however, were different in make-up from any subsequent set of spectators. They were monied and judgemental, for they paid double the normal entrance charge in order to be able to evaluate the play. They would clap the passages they liked and hiss those they didn’t; at the end of a performance they would be collectively asked whether the text could be performed again. Their cries of ‘ay’ (yes) and ‘no’ supplied the answer.<sup>20</sup> Some of Shakespeare’s prologues and epilogues anticipate this terrifying moment of judgement for their playwright, and are obviously relevant for first performances only. The epilogue for 2 *Henry IV* is haunted because ‘I was lately here in the end of a displeasing play, to pray your patience for it, and to promise you a better’; the trouble is that he does not yet know whether *this* play will be seen as an improvement: ‘if like an ill venture it come unluckily home, I break; [...] here I commit my body to your mercies’ (Epilogue 8–13). Hardly surprisingly, given the connection between prologues and epilogues and first (rather than repeated) performance, Shakespeare plays that survive in more than one form often differ as to the presence or absence of stage orations. *Henry V*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida* all survive in two or more textual forms, at least one of which contains a prologue and at least one of which does not.

### Court versus playhouse

Court approval, as well as audience approval, was another separate but worrying moment for a playwright, and additional special prologues and epilogues were written for royal productions. One freestanding epilogue survives that is thought by some to be by Shakespeare; starting ‘As the dial hand tells o’er’, it is a special one-off oration for a play in front of Queen Elizabeth.<sup>21</sup> It, and/or others like it, must have worked, for Shakespeare’s dramas were put on at court year after year. Indeed, the entire company for which he wrote gained ever-increasing royal approval. When King James gave the troupe the title ‘the King’s Men’ in 1603, he elevated its sharers, Shakespeare included, to the position of ‘grooms of the chamber’; they were allowed to wear scarlet livery and march in state processions. As time went on, then, Shakespeare would have spent more festival and celebratory occasions in royal palaces; the contents of royal libraries may have provided some of his sources.

Court performance was a boon for any company both in terms of money – about £10 would be paid for a royal production (£6.13s.4d if the monarch were absent) – and in terms of reputation and prestige.<sup>22</sup> More important

still, court performance offered troupes protection. There was a heavily puritanical faction in London who were keen to stop all plays and pull the theatres down, but theatre companies, using the argument that public performances were 'rehearsals' for performance at court, insisted that putting on productions was a royal duty. The Master of the Revels, in charge of entertaining the king, concurred, taking the best or most favoured of the new plays mounted each year for court performance over Christmas.

Naturally, sections were specifically inserted into plays for the court's delectation. In some Shakespeare texts traces of this habit can be guessed at. So in *The Tempest* the masque prepared for does not seem to be the one presented: Prospero asks Ariel to return with dancers 'in a twink' (4.1.43) – Ariel then returns with one goddess; Prospero tells Ariel to come again with 'a corollary' (4.1.57) – Ariel then does not return at all, and Iris enters. The 'marriage' masque actually performed inside *The Tempest* appears to replace a different and more relevant masque, having perhaps been added into the text for performance at the court celebrations of the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the single extant version of *Macbeth* contains a moment when Macbeth is shown the line of kings who will descend from Banquo: he sees 'A show of eight kings, [the] last with a glass in his hand, and Banquo' (4.1.127 SD). The '[looking] glass', it has been suggested, would only make absolute sense if James I were supposed to look into it; a descendant of Banquo, he would then see the line of kings stretching out to – himself.<sup>24</sup>

Shakespeare's writing, then, may have been (re)shaped – not necessarily by him – to match court preoccupations. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's works were, in the first instance, designed for repeated performance on the public stage in front of a public audience. Leonard Digges, in his 'Upon Master William Shakespeare', even claimed that 'the Globe ... prospered' only because of Shakespeare, detailing what happened 'when Caesar would appear, / And on the stage at half-sword parley were, / Brutus and Cassius'. Then, he wrote, 'the audience / Were ravished'.<sup>25</sup> They were 'ravished', as he makes clear, by the 'parley', the words, but as he also indicates, they were moved too by the vigorous staging, the swords, the powerful presence of the actors. Shakespeare's popularity – and full complexity – was reliant on the stage(s) that nurtured him; this chapter has attempted to show why and how.

## NOTES

- 1 Richard Brome, *The English Moor*, in *Five New Plays* (1659), p. 86.
- 2 For more on apprentices, see David Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freeman and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theater', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 55 (2004), 1–49.

- 3 W. J. Lawrence, *Old Theatre Days and Ways* (London: G. G. Harrap & Co., 1935), p. 178.
- 4 'Types' and acting range are considered in detail in Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 43–56.
- 5 REED York, 2 vols., ed. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson (Toronto and Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 1979), vol. I, p. 353. The *Midsummer Night's Dream* rehearsal and its relationship to other rehearsals is explored in Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), chapters 2 and 3. For an in-depth look at Shakespeare's plays divided into actors' parts, see Palfrey and Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts*.
- 6 Samuel Nicholson, *Acolastus* (1600), sig. G3v.
- 7 For an exploration of how little narrative actors sometimes knew, and how reliant they were on cues, see Palfrey and Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts*, pp. 83–8.
- 8 Richard Flecknoe, *Love's Kingdom* (1664), sig. G7a–b; 'On Mr Richard Burbidge an Excellent both Player, and Painter', Folger MS, v.a.97. For typecasting versus acting range, see Palfrey and Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts*, pp. 43–5.
- 9 For more on the London Liberties, see Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- 10 The legal records are reproduced in C. W. Wallace, *Shakespeare and his London Associates* (Nebraska: University Studies, 1910). For a dramatic description of what this moment may have been like, see James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), chapter 1.
- 11 John Stephens, *New Essays and Characters* (1631), p. 292; William Prynne, *Histriomastix* (1633), sig. 3D3v.
- 12 For the 'private theatre' Liberties situated within the London walls, see Mary Bly, 'Playing the Tourist in Early Modern London: Selling the Liberties Onstage', *PMLA*, 122 (2007), 61–71.
- 13 Francis Lenton, *The young Gallants Whirligigg* (1629), p. 16. For smells in the early modern theatre, see Jonathan Gil Harris, 'The Smell of Macbeth', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58 (2007), 465–86, and Tiffany Stern, "'Taking Part": Actors and Audience on the Blackfriars Stage', in Paul Menzer (ed.), *Inside Shakespeare: Essays on the Blackfriars Stage* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), pp. 35–53.
- 14 John Taylor, *The Praise, Antiquity, and Commodity, of Beggery* (1621), sig. C3v. For the kind of person who attended the playhouses more generally, see Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (3rd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 15 Thomas Dekker, *The Guls Hornbook*, in Alexander B. Grosart (ed.), *The Non-Dramatic Works*, 5 vols. (1884; New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), vol. II, p. 203.
- 16 Abraham Cowley, *The Guardian* (1650), sig. D3r; Henry Parrot, *The Mastive* (1615), sig. A4b. For the reading and writing audience, see Tiffany Stern, 'Watching as Reading: The Audience and Written Text in the Early Modern Playhouse', in Laurie Maguire (ed.), *How to Do Things with Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 136–59.
- 17 John Webster's additions to John Marston's *The Malecontent* (1604), sig. A3r.
- 18 For more on table-books, see Peter Stallybrass, Roger Chartier, J. Franklin Mowery and Heather Wolfe, 'Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 55 (2004), 379–419.



- 19 Richard Flecknoe, *Miscellania* (1653), pp. 103–4.
- 20 Tiffany Stern, ‘“A Small-Beer Health to His Second Day”: Playwrights, Prologues, and First Performances in the Early Modern Theatre’, *Studies in Philology*, 101 (2004), 172–99 (175–6).
- 21 Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 119.
- 22 Though it is unclear what takings were made at public performance, sharers would attract between £100 and £150 a year from collected productions; they would make more if they had additional ‘house-keeper’ roles. Thus money for royal performance was a boon but not essential. See E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), vol. I, p. 370.
- 23 Irwin Smith, ‘Ariel and the Masque in *The Tempest*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 21 (1970), 213–22.
- 24 Stern, *Making Shakespeare*, pp. 32–3.
- 25 Leonard Digges, in William Shakespeare, *Poems* (1640), sigs. \*3v–\*4r.

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