“Look how he looks!”: Queerness and Visual Pleasure in the Early Modern Theater

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Abstract

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"Look how he looks!": Queerness and Visual Pleasure in the Early Modern Theater calls for a radical reassessment of visibility and visual pleasure in early modern theaters. Despite the recent flourishing of audience studies, accounts of theatergoing continue to rely (implicitly or explicitly) on a model of spectatorship derived from film and mass media theories: the singular gaze that surveys a framed and bounded visual field. This restrictive conception of spectatorship has obscured the multiplicity and instability of gazes that crisscross the playhouse during any given performance. Unlike the anonymous isolation experienced in a darkened cinema or a proscenium arch theater, shared-lighting amphitheaters with their thrust stages exposed spectators as well as actors to view. The visual hierarchy of the stage over the auditorium was destabilized by a competition for looks not only among actors vying for the attention of spectators, but also among spectators seeking the attention of other spectators, and even among spectators trying to catch the actors' eyes: any supposed distinction between subject and object of the gaze was constantly shifting. Playwrights like Chrisopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare exploited the ways that such visual flux manifested ambiguities inherent in contemporary linguistic and scientific approaches to sight. In early modern English, words like "look," "gaze," and "eye" functioned as both verb and noun and troubled distinctions between active and passive, agent and patient. Early modern science generated similar confusions, offering two competing theories of vision: intromission (images penetrate the eye) and extromission (eyebeams penetrate the surrounding environment). This epistemological uncertainty fueled a preoccupation, amongst playwrights and antitheatricalists alike, with the dynamics of visibility. The questions went far beyond how an actor appeared to the audience. Playgoers too were urged to ask themselves, "How do I look?" "How does my being seen affect others, and myself?" "Should I be seen?" "Where should I look?" "Why is seeing and being seen so pleasurable?" These questions in turn helped shape how playwrights conceived of identity and selfhood. From *Doctor Faustus* to *Richard II* and *Hamlet*, the great "individuals" of the Elizabethan stage are overwhelmed by their awareness of being watched ("too much in the sun") while they are also desperately competing with others for attention. The spectatorial self-consciousness of the period's plays could only have been created with the eyes of early modern theatergoers in mind.

In erasing binaries like looker and looked-at, penetrator and penetrated, male and female, and thus destabilizing traditionally gendered hierarchies of visual control and domination, playhouse gazing was a fundamentally queer pleasure – like playgoing itself. Studies of queerness in early modern drama often remain fixated on the stage and on the homoerotic spectacles enacted between boy players and adult actors. Yet the stage was by no means the playhouse's only (or even primary) source of visual eroticism, which was instead dispersed throughout the theater in the dense webs of looks in which actors' and spectators' eyes were enmeshed during performances. Plays like

Jonson's *Poetaster* and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* explore how theaters functioned as cruising grounds for those looking for sodomitical sex (including, though not limited to, men seeking sex with men). I argue that theater became a site – and a sight – of sodomy because it facilitated a queer multiplicity of gazes and visual exchanges impossible in other early modern spaces. My project thereby contributes to the history of urban queer cruising, too often thought of exclusively in terms of the post-19th century male flaneur.

For Mum

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Mum, had I as many souls as there be stars, I'd give them all for you.

Introduction: "The show and gaze o'th' time"

In the most famous instance of the play-within-the-play trope in Western drama, Hamlet stages *The Mousetrap* in order to "catch the conscience" of his fratricidal uncle Claudius.[1] His plan seems simple enough:

> I'll have these players
> Play something like the murder of my father
> Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks;
> I'll tent him to the quick. If a do blench,
> I know my course. (2.2.596-600)

Yet for all its apparent simplicity, Hamlet's vision of theater challenges us to rethink some of our most basic assumptions about the experience of watching a play. Strikingly, Hamlet suggests that it is not the *actors* onstage but rather the "looks" of the *spectator* Claudius that will claim his sole and whole attention. Indeed, Hamlet is determined to look at nothing but Claudius's "looks": "For I mine eyes will rivet to his face" (3.2.86). However, precisely what Hamlet means by "looks" remains unclear, an ambiguity compounded by the image of 'blenching.' Although editors of the play traditionally gloss "blench" as "flinch," denoting a movement of the body, alternative definitions of "blench" available to Shakespeare and his contemporaries suggest a movement "Of the eyes: To lose firmness of glance," or "To turn aside or away (the eyes)."[2] Is Hamlet's attention to be focused on Claudius's physical demeanour and expression (what he looks like) or his gaze (what he looks at)? Do Claudius's "looks" produce a looked-at object or a looking subject?

Like Hamlet, my dissertation is fascinated by the "looks" of early modern playgoers. In staging *The Mousetrap*, Hamlet makes spectatorship itself the object of attention (looking at Claudius's looking). Rather than privileging the stage over the auditorium, as we might expect, Hamlet's theater involves the dispersal of "spatial authority"[3] throughout the playhouse. If the focus on Claudius's "looks" destabilizes the hierarchy of onstage actor over offstage spectator, the very distinction between actor and spectator is itself called into question by the multiple meanings of "looks." Are Claudius's "looks" those of a spectator looking, or those of a spectacle being looked at? And what about Hamlet's looks, and the looks of the players onstage?

Once Hamlet is assembled with his fellow playgoers to watch *The Mousetrap*, he finds a whole theater of looks that demand – and divide – his attentions. After quizzing Polonius on his days as a university player and sexually harassing Ophelia, Hamlet redirects their attentions to Gertrude: "For look you how cheerfully my mother looks" (3.2.128-9). Of course, throughout the scene (as throughout the play) Hamlet not only looks but is also looked at: "O ho! do you mark that?" Polonius asks Claudius in aside when the prince begins to hassle Ophelia (3.2.112). When Ophelia describes Hamlet as "Th'observ'd of all observers" (3.1.155), she figures him as the object of general scrutiny while at the same time reminding him that he, too, is in amongst "all observers." Hamlet and the other playgoers who come together for *The Mousetrap* all find themselves enmeshed in a web of

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[1] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2006), 2.2.607. Subsequent quotations from the play will be cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.

[2] "blench, v.," *OED Online*, March 2023, Oxford University Press, https://www-oed-com/view/Entry/20126 (accessed May 07, 2023).

[3] Stephen Purcell uses this phrase to refer to any modern stage space that is (literally or figuratively) "behind the arch." Stephen Purcell, *Shakespeare and Audience in Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 12.

looks: looking at each other, looking at each other looking – not to mention finding time to look at the action onstage.

Indeed, Claudius's failure to react to the provocative re-enactment of his crime in the dumb show preceding *The Mousetrap* has been taken as evidence that he isn't paying enough attention to the performance.[4] Yet rather than simply dismiss this as another one of Claudius's many personal failings, I suggest that we think more seriously about why Claudius might have been distracted at such a moment. As Jeffrey Knapp has shown, the early modern playhouse was characterized by a "visual depth of field" so that "Even if the action onstage should be found wanting, the theater… has still more perspectives to offer: views of the packed galleries, or of the stealthy cutpurse, or of the standing room on the floor."[5] Hamlet himself, for all his determination to "rivet" his "eyes" to Claudius's "face," is distracted by the looks of his mother, Ophelia, and Polonius, as well as the performers onstage. Typically, we have been led to think about attention in the theater as the object of a competition between actors. In William Shakespeare's own *Richard II*, the Duke of York imagines the fallen king and his conqueror Bolingbroke as players competing for public affection. Having already lost on the battlefield, Richard, forced to follow Bolingbroke through the streets on his victory parade, loses again:

> As in a theater the eyes of men,
> After a well-grac'd actor leaves the stage,
> Are idly bent on him that enters next,
> Thinking his prattle to be tedious;
> Even so, or with so much more contempt, men's eyes
> Did scowl on Richard.[6]

York imagines an actor's theater, one where "the eyes of [*all*] men" are fixed on the performers, and these spectators' eyes survey a unified and bounded visual field. Yet in the theater where Hamlet puts on *The Mousetrap* – and, I will argue, in the early modern theater of which it is a paradigm – attentions are fractured and divided, resulting in a competition for looks not only among actors vying for the attention of spectators, but also among spectators seeking the attention of other spectators, and even among spectators trying to catch the actors' eyes.

Hamlet, for his part, continually interrupts *The Mousetrap,* drawing such focus to himself that Ophelia explicitly places him in competition for attention with the action onstage. First attempting to ignore his antics – "You are naught, you are naught. I'll mark the play" (*instead*) (3.2.149-50) – Ophelia eventually accuses Hamlet of assuming an actorly role: "You are as good as a chorus, my lord" (3.2.247). When Claudius finally halts the performance after realizing that his crimes are being re-enacted onstage, he steals away from the playing space, taking everyone but Hamlet and Horatio with him. Rather than reflecting on what Claudius's exit means for his revenge mission, however, Hamlet's first reaction is to take to the stage himself:

> Why, let the strucken deer go weep,
> The hart ungalled play;
> For some must watch while some must sleep,
> Thus runs the world away.

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[4] See Ann Thomson and Neil Taylor (eds.), *Hamlet*, 313n.
[5] Jeffrey Knapp, *Pleasing Everyone: Mass Entertainment in Renaissance London and Golden-Age Hollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 61.
[6] Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. Charles R. Forker (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2002), 5.2.23-8.

> Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers, if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me, with Provincial roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players?
> (3.2.273-280)

At the very moment, "after" the end of the play, that Hamlet had planned to calmly "join" with Horatio "In censure" of Claudius's "seeming" (3.2.87-8), he loses focus and turns player instead. For Hamlet, looking at the theater – at the players; at the other playgoers; and at their various and ever-changing looks – culminates in a passionate plea: 'Look at me, too!'

The staging of *The Mousetrap* offers a useful starting point for thinking about the polysemous nature of theatrical looks; how actors and spectators alike became tangled in webs of mutual regard during theatrical performances; and the potential impact of these various looks on early modern subjectivities and sexualities. The novel architecture of the open-air Elizabethan amphitheater plays a pivotal role in this history. As John Jeffries Martin notes, it has become a critical commonplace that "strategies of self-presentation reached a new level of intensity in the early sixteenth century," with individuals increasingly self-conscious about (or at least self-conscious in documenting) the existence of a "performative self." Crucially, Martin explains, "New technologies played contributing roles. Some scholars have speculated, for example, that the development of the flat mirror in this period enabled a new sense of self, encouraging a kind of self-reflection and self-portraiture that had little precedent before the 1500s."[7] Alongside the mirror, other historians have suggested that the evolution of private rooms in houses – such as the study – fostered (or were borne out of) changing conceptions of private individualized selfhood.[8] I argue that the open-air amphitheater should also be understood as a novel socio-architectural technology that shaped understandings and experiences of identity, of being in the world.

However, rather than succumbing to the seductive appeal of the myth of a sudden emergence of stable individual identities, I argue instead that the uniquely charged and complex looking relations determined by amphitheatrical architecture generated experiences of identity formation which resisted neat boundaries like interior and exterior, private and public, or individual and communal. It has become trendy to dismiss antitheatrical writers as a "lunatic fringe"[9] possessed of a "naïve epistemology."[10] Yet by taking antitheatrical writers more seriously, and reading their tracts alongside plays by Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Jonson, my dissertation reveals a shared fascination with the sexual and psychological implications of seeing and being seen at the playhouse. While occupying similar intellectual terrain, the antitheatricalists and the playwrights also had overlapping financial interests – theatergoing would only remain a hot topic for the pamphleteers for as long as people were going to the theater. Their pamphlets and plays grapple with key questions that actors and spectators were confronted by during the theatrical event. What is my effect when I am seen? What is the effect of my seeing on others? How do I look? What does it mean to be seen, or not seen?

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[7] John Jeffries Martin, "The Myth of Renaissance Individualism," in *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, ed. Guido Ruggiero (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 214-16.
[8] Linda Woodbridge, "Renaissance Bogeymen: The Necessary Monsters of the Age," in *Worlds of the Renaissance*, 453.
[9] Rory Loughnane, "Introduction: Stages of Transgression," in *Staged Transgression in Shakespeare's England*, ed. Rory Loughnane and Edel Semple (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 6.
[10] Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 6.

Hamlet imagines that merely by looking at Claudius's "looks," at his surface, he can penetrate deep to the very "quick" of him: as well as troubling the distinction between subject and object of the gaze, looks thus further trouble distinctions between exterior and interior, body and soul. In the plays I explore in subsequent chapters – Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Jonson's *Poetaster*, and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* – experiences (and crises) of selfhood are centred on such visual concerns: interiorities paradoxically emerge from exteriorities, from looks. From Doctor Faustus to Richard II and Hamlet, the great heroes of the Elizabethan stage are ultimately the products of a kind of spectatorial self-consciousness. Simultaneously overwhelmed by their awareness of being watched ("too much in the sun," as Hamlet says [1.2.67]) and yet desperate for attention, such complex characterizations could only have been created with the eyes of early modern theatergoers in mind.

Rethinking "the gaze"

Today we have a singular definition of "the gaze" characterized by stability and control: "The act of looking fixedly or intently; a *steady* or intent look."[11] Certainly this meaning was available to Shakespeare, as in *Troilus and Cressida*, where Ulysses taunts Troilus by describing how Diomedes "neither looks on heaven nor on earth, / But gives all gaze and bent of amorous view / On the fair Cressid."[12] Yet equally common in Shakespeare's oeuvre is the usage, now obsolete, locating "the gaze" not in the looker but rather the looked-at: "That which is gazed or stared at."[13] Thus in the *Sonnets* Shakespeare figures his beloved young man as "The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,"[14] while Macduff confronts Macbeth with his public disgrace: "yield thee, coward, / And live to be the show and gaze o'th' time."[15] Whereas when we think of a gaze the axis of attention – subject versus object – is hierarchically fixed, early modern gazes resisted such conceptual clarity.

Critics of renaissance drama have often relied too heavily on notions of "the gaze" originating in film theory. In an essay on *Troilus and Cressida* Barbara Hodgson argues that "as in classical Hollywood cinema," the play's "relentless focus on male surveillance … privileges the male gaze as well as the male project called the play, offering males particular, and particularly gendered specular competence, or what Laura Mulvey has called 'visual pleasure.'"[16] Yet while Mulvey's seminal theorization of the gaze has proved useful in considering the play's objectification of female beauty, any account of *Troilus and Cressida* relying fully upon her paradigm of the heterosexual male cinemagoer offers a

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[11] "gaze, n.," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/77224 (accessed May 07, 2023).
[12] Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. David Bevington (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2015), 4.5.281-3. Subsequent quotations from the play will be cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.
[13] "gaze, n.," *OED Online*.
[14] Shakespeare, "Sonnet 5," in *Shakepeare's Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2010), line 2.
[15] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2015), 5.8.23-4.
[16] Barbara Hodgson, "He Do Cressida in Different Voices," *English Literary Renaissance* 20, no. 2 (1990), 258. See also Linda Charnes, "'So Unsecret to Ourselves': Notorious Identity and the Material Subject in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1989), and Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

limited view of Shakespeare's text while ignoring entirely the material conditions of early modern playing. Mulvey describes how the cinema screen reveals

> a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy. Moreover, the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. … Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer.[17]

Mulvey's cinematic model has often been imported wholesale into the theatrical context. Katherine Eisaman Maus characterizes early modern "theatrical spectatorship" as "voyeurism," positing an "analogue" between "the cuckold's marginality" to plots of sexual intrigue and "the exclusion of the spectator from the action of the play, an exclusion ambiguous in precisely similar ways. Like the cuckold, the spectators in the theater see but are themselves unseen."[18] Yet such a sense of "voyeuristic separation" was impossible in early modern theaters, where (as *The Mousetrap* suggests) spectators were *intensely* seen. Instead of isolating "spectators from one another" or repressing "their exhibitionism," shared lighting amphitheaters such as the Globe cultivated what Lars Engle terms "a community of mutual regard'[19] where, as Kent Cartwright explains, playgoers were "physically present to each other" and "recognize[d] their own and others' reactions."[20]

To date, the only major monograph on early modern theatrical spectatorship oriented around the concept of "the gaze" is Barbara Freedman's *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy*.[21] Freedman contends that the "Elizabethan world picture" was predicated upon "what we might term a spectator consciousness, an epistemological model based upon an observer who stands outside of what she sees in a definite position of mastery over it."[22] Shakespearean comedy, conversely, works to "enact the subversion of the stable position of viewer which occurs during the performance of these plays" and is thus part of a "countertradition devoted to the subversion of a spectator consciousness."[23] Freedman's readings of the plays are convincing and compelling and I wholeheartedly share her sense of the countercultural *subversiveness* of playhouse looking. Moreover, Freedman's study foregrounds the insufficiency of a cinematic framework for thinking about theatrical looking, noting that "The Elizabethan theater in the round offered an unusually provocative physical site for the performance of plays fascinated with subverting the truth of any private, individual, or

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[17] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975), 9.
[18] Katherine Eisaman Maus, "Horns of Dilemma: Gender, Jealousy, and Spectatorship in English Renaissance Drama," *ELH* 54, no. 3 (1987), 566-572.
[19] Lars Engle, "'I am that I am': Shakespeare's Sonnets and the Economy of Shame," in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 191.
[20] Kent Cartwright, *Shakespearean Tragedy and Its Double: The Rhythms of Audience Response* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 25.
[21] For another account of spectatorship heavily influenced by psychoanalytical paradigms, see Thomas Cartelli, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the Economy of Theatrical Experience* (Philadelphia, 1991). That these works appeared in the same year suggests that they represent a (briefly staged) resistance to the then quasi-tyrannical domination of historicism over early modern literary criticism. Since the turn of the century such intellectual faultlines have become less fiercely contested, with critics increasingly embracing methodological eclecticism, as in the landmark anthology *Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Early Modern Culture*, eds. Carla Mazzio and Douglas Trevor (New York: Routledge, 2000).
[22] Freedman, *Staging the Gaze*, 9.
[23] Ibid, 3-9.

fixed vantage point."[24] Yet while Freedman highlights the multiple points of view this kind of "theater in the round" afforded, in her account the stage retains is privileged position as the center of attention. By contrast, my dissertation explores how early modern theatergoers experienced complex looking relations that blurred distinctions between actor and spectator, subject and object of the gaze. Analyzing performance conditions at the reconstructed Globe in London, Penelope Woods explains that

> In a performance situation in which delivering lines *to* an audience is an essential feature of performance, what the audience gives *back* becomes proportionally more significant. Giving lines out to an audience an actor has an expectation (or hope) of his or her ability to move an audience to tears, to laughter, to understanding. Actors in this kind of performance situation develop an instinctual investment in the looks and faces of their audience, as much as audiences are invested in the faces of the performers[.][25]

By *looking back* at spectators, by locking eyes with them, early modern actors destabilized the attentional hierarchies upon which cinematic and post-proscenium arch approaches to spectatorship depend.

Alongside experiences of mutual gazing, participants in the theatrical event necessarily rendered themselves vulnerable to the unseen gazes of others. In particular, those onstage, or people standing in the groundling pit, could have been looked at, subjected to anonymous penetrating eyes, from every possible angle. Although, strictly speaking, late Elizabethan amphitheaters like the Globe, the Rose, and the Fortune featured "thrust stages," given the presence of spectators in the galleries directly above the stage, "theater-in-the-round" is the more apposite parallel. However, even in modern theater-in-the-round productions there is generally an assumption that the stage remains the privileged centre of theatrical attention. It is a central tenet of my dissertation that early modern open-air amphitheater stages lacked any such secure sense of "spatial authority," with attentions dispersed instead throughout (and beyond) the playhouse.

"Eyes in eyes"

As we have seen, for early moderners "the gaze" could refer either to the looker or to the looked-at – or even, "as in a theater," to both simultaneously. The linguistic slipperiness of "the gaze" was rooted in similar contradictions in contemporary physiology, which had inherited two competing theories of human vision from the ancient world. Proponents of "extramission" cast the eye as an active, penetrating member, beaming forth its spirits into the surrounding environment. As Thijs Weststeijn explains, if these spirits encountered a human object they might "penetrate it through its weakest point, the eyes," thereby committing an act of "ocular assault."[26] Such an "ocular assault" is precisely what Shakespeare's Venus accuses Adonis of in arousing her passions: "Thine eyes dart forth the fire that burneth me."[27] However, in the very same poem we find examples of

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[24] Ibid, 25.
[25] Penelope Woods, "The Play of Looks: Audience and the Force of the Early Modern Face," in *Shakespeare and the Power of the Face*, ed. James Knapp (New York: Routledge, 2015), 140. See also Pauline Kiernan, *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999) and W.B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
[26] Thijs Weststeijn, "Seeing and the transfer of spirits in early modern art theory," in *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, ed. John Shannon Hendrix and Charles H. Carman (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 155.
[27] Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*, in *Shakespeare's Poems: Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece, and The Shorter Poems*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woodhuysen (London: The

"intromission" – whose proponents cast the eye in a receptive role, passive and penetrable – as when the goddess is confronted by the spectacle of Adonis slain, "Which seen, her eyes as murder'd with the view, / Like stars ashamed of day, themselves withdrew" (1031-32). At yet another moment in the poem the active/passive, doer/done-to dichotomy disappears entirely, with Venus imploring Adonis: "Look in mine eye-balls, there thy beauty lies: / Then why not lips on lips, since eyes in eyes?" (119-20).

I argue that the opportunity to engage in such mutual gazing – indeed, to participate in a veritable orgy of "eyes in eyes" – lay at the heart of theatergoing's appeal to late Elizabethan Londoners. Anxiety concerning the seductive, disruptive potential of playhouse gazing is a key feature of the period's antitheatrical literature. Early modern antitheatricalists repeatedly stress the collaborative dimension of theater's sexualized looks, undermining any distinction between actors and spectators. Anthony Munday contends that "Only the filthiness of plays and spectacles is such as maketh both the actors and beholders guilty alike. For while they say naught, but gladly look on, they all by sight and assent are actors."[28] However, for Munday the issue of ocular "assent" is itself confused. Consider this description, later in the same tract, of the "double offense" which "is committed" between players and playgoers:

> first by those dissolute players, which without regard of honesty are not ashamed to exhibit the filthiest matters they can devise to the sight of men; secondly by the beholders, which vouchsafe to hear and behold such filthy things, to the great loss both of themselves and the time. There commeth much evil in at the ears but more at the eyes; by these two open windows death breaketh into the soul. Nothing entereth in more effectually into the memory than that which commeth by seeing; things heard do lightly pass away, but the tokens of that which we have seen, saith Petrarch, stick fast in us *whether we will or no, and yet they enter not into us unless we be willing, except very seldom*.[29]

Assuming a model of *passive* intromission ("commeth … in"; "breaketh into"; "entereth"), Munday seems nevertheless to insist upon the *active* volition of the "beholders" who "vouchsafe [i.e. *choose*] to hear and behold such filthy things," only to perform a final volte-face by imagining the exceptional and "seldom"-seen *unwilling* spectator. Spectators' eyes are simultaneously vulnerable to and complicit in co-creating "filthy" stage spectacle.

But what about *offstage* spectacle? Scholars have generally overlooked the fact that what antitheatricalists abhorred above all were the visual bonds forged between spectators and actors across and throughout the entire auditorium.[30] Existing alongside intromission-based concerns about eyes being assaulted were extramission-inspired fears about the

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Arden Shakespeare, 2007), line 196. Subsequent quotations from the poem will be cited parenthetically by line number.

[28] Anthony Munday, *A Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theaters* (London, 1580), 3.

[29] Ibid, 95-6; my emphasis.

[30] One notable recent exception is Jean Howard, who emphasizes "the materiality of the things to which" antitheatrical "invective was directed":

> Its accusers did not like *when* plays were performed; did not like what the *physical shape* of the amphitheaters meant for the visibility of the women spectators; they did not like *casting conventions* (boys play women) and the use of *costumes* that obscured the social identity of the actors. All this they objected to quite apart from the actual content of the plays written for these objectionable theater spaces. Jean Howard, "Afterword: Thinking Staged Transgression Literally," in *Staged Transgression in Shakespeare's England*, 253.

My arguments concerning theatrical looking relations are much aligned with Howard's insights. However, where Howard imagines early modern spectators' "visibility" to each other being determined by heterosexist positions of power, I argue that their looks were queered by the conditions of open-air amphitheater playing.

mobility of eyes, their ability (unique amongst the sensory organs) to wander over a diverse and potentially distant visual field. Gosson describes how

> In the playhouses at London, it is the fashion of youths to go first into the yard and to carry their eye through every gallery; then, like unto ravens where they spy their carrion, thither they fly, and press as near to the fairest as they can … they dally with their garments to pass the time, they minister talk upon all occasions, and either bring them home to their houses on small acquaintance, or slip into taverns when the plays are done.[31]

Gosson's account is suggestive of the dynamic energy animating open-air amphitheaters, with eyes and bodies constantly moving around the auditorium, connecting and colliding, throughout performances. Optic and haptic sensations overlap as the hungry eyes carried "through every gallery" morph into desiring bodies "press[ing]" against one another in pursuit of an ultimate sexual encounter outside the theater after the play is "done." It was not just self-professed enemies of the theater industry who imagined playhouses as cruising grounds for sex. A diary entry by Shakespeare's contemporary Londoner John Manningham recounts how the playwright, having overheard his star actor Richard Burbage planning a tryst with a female fan after a performance of *Richard III,* gets to the assignation first, takes Burbage's place in her bed, and later gloats that "William the Conqueror was before Richard III."[32] While the specific incident remains unverifiable, Manningham's tale nevertheless reveals that contemporaries took for granted the theater's facilitation of sexualized gazes – the "winking and glancing of wanton eyes" – not only between spectators, or between actors, but also between actors and spectators.

Queering "the gaze"

In his epistle "*To the Gentlewomen Citizens of London*," Stephen Gosson warns female readers against the danger of "present[ing] yourselves in open theatres. Thought is free; you can forbid no man that vieweth you to note you, and that noteth you, to judge you for entering to places of suspicion." The risk to reputation morphs into the threat of rape as Gosson shifts his attention from female looked-at-ness to female looking:

> If you do but … join looks with an amorous gazer, you have already made yourselves assaultable, and yielded your cities to be sacked. A wanton eye is the dart of Cephalus; where it leveleth, there it lighteth, and where it hits, it woundeth deep. If you give but a glance to your beholders, you have vailed the bonnet in token of obedience; for the bolt is fallen ere the air clap; the bullet passed, ere the piece crack; the cold taken, ere the body shiver; and the match made, ere you strike hands.[33]

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[31] Stephen Gosson, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (London, 1582), G6r.

[32] "Manningham, John," in *A Dictionary of Shakespeare,* ed. Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[33] Stephen Gosson, *The School of Abuse*, (London, 1579), F2r-F2v. Starting with John Northbrooke, whose foundational tract was published only a year after the opening of England's first permanent playhouse, antitheatricalists viewed the urge to rape not simply as a by-product of playgoing but rather as the motivation for building theaters in the first place:

> Romulus (after Remus his brother was slain) erected and built up a certain spectacle and place of safeguard for all transgressors that would come thither, practicing thereby to ravish all maidens of the country resorting to their new erected place in Mount Palatine. At solemn games and plays, they overcame the people of Cenia, and slew their king. Saint Augustine says that the women of Saba, being of curiosity desirous to be present at open spectacles, were raped and ravished by the Romans[.] *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, And Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes* (London, 1577), 60.

While Gosson misogynistically places responsibility on the female playgoer for avoiding becoming "assaultable" in the first place, it nevertheless remains unclear whose is the penetrative "wanton eye" that "woundeth deep" – is it an "amorous" male "gazer," or is it Gosson's addressee returning a "glance" to her "beholders"? Ambiguously cast as both the victim and the perpetrator of ocular rape, the sexualized eye thus destabilizes traditionally gendered hierarchies of control and domination.

In Gosson's account, theatrical looks confuse normative distinctions like active and passive, penetrator and penetrated, and male and female. Gosson thus reveals a conception of playhouse looking as fundamentally queer – or, in sixteenth-century terminology, sodomitical. Such looking practices are queer in the "metaphorical sense" proposed by Anna Kérchy, for whom "queering is all about hijacking the normativizing gaze" and its "gendered distribution of power positions within the regime of spectatorship and visibility (one that hierarchically orders the active masculine spectator above the passive, eroticized, feminized object to be looked at)."[34]

If such looking relations in the early modern theater were metaphorically queer, they were also recognized as physically sodomitical, too. Gosson's fellow antitheatricalist, Philip Stubbes, charts a direct progression from playhouse looking to sodomitical sex. Stubbes is both disgusted and dazzled by the visual interactions he sees on show at the playhouse, describing

> such winking and glancing of wanton eyes, and the like [that] is used, as is wonderful to behold. Then these goodly pageants being done, every mate sorts to his mate, everyone brings another homeward of their way very friendly, and in their secret conclaves (covertly) they play the sodomites, or worse.[35]

Although this (in)famous passage is generally understood to refer specifically to homosexual encounters between male playgoers,[36] "his mate" might refer to a man or a woman. Early modern "sodomites" were persons of either gender who transgressed a vast array of social and religious norms.[37] The ultimate threat of early modern sodomy – as of modern queerness – lay in the sodomite's defiance of boundaries and resistance to definition. For Stubbes and his contemporaries, the play of looks between spectators and actors, the "winking and glancing of wanton eyes," was an essential component of theater's sodomitical – or queer – potential.

Thus we should not – indeed, we cannot – *unsex* the queerness of early modern theatergoing. Antitheatricalists like Stubbes and plays like Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* insisted that theaters were cruising-grounds for sex where "*Sodomits*" found like-minded "mates," while the period's satirical writings were populated by figures like Edward Guilpin's "fine fellow" who attends "euery play, and euery night / Sups with his *Ingles*."[38] Theater's perceived popularity amongst sexual deviants in general, and men seeking sex with men in particular, was firmly established in early modern England.

Gosson similarly asserts that "The first building of theatres was to ravish the Sabines, and that they were continued in whoredom ever after, Ovid confesseth." Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, *G*5v-G6r.

[34] Anna Kérchy, "Queering the Gaze in the Museal Space: Orshi Drozdik's Feminist (Post)Concept Art," in *Space, Gender, and the Gaze in Literature and Art*, ed. Ágnes Kovács and László Sári (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 64.

[35] Philip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses* (London, 1583), L8r-L8v.

[36] For example, see Levine, *Men in women's clothing*, 22.

[37] For example, a married couple engaging in non-procreative oral/anal sexual practices constituted sodomy. For a detailed account of how early modern sodomy "was a broader concept than simply homosexuality" see Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Shakespeare's England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 13-17.

[38] Edward Guilpin, *Skialetheia, or, a Shadowe of Truth in Certaine Epigrams and Satyres* (London, 1598), B1v.

Ultimately, the metaphorical queerness of theater depended on its accommodation of deviant sexual desires and practices. As Alisa Solomon explains,

> One consequence of "playing the *Sodomits*" and erasing borders of sexual categories was losing *all* sense of boundary and propriety, all sense of self. … Theatre threatened this too, through the shameless display of the actor's skills at changing, apparently, his very nature. His abilities called into question the notion that anyone actually has a nature. … Theatre, by *its* nature, reveals and revels in the very angst the antitheatricalists were frantically trying to quell: the notion of identities as contingent and malleable and the suggestion that categories can be playfully transgressed – *queered*.[39]

My dissertation reflects on how the various looks displayed, wielded by, and exchanged between participants in the theatrical process underpinned their experiences of "identities as contingent and malleable." If, on the one hand, habitual theatergoers were afforded a space in which they could pay to be looked at – and thereby cultivate their own public personae – on the other hand the fact that their acts of self-fashioning depended on attracting the attentive eyes of others rendered them vulnerable to "losing *all* sense of boundary and propriety, all sense of self."

"An unclean generation"

If the playhouse functioned as a space encouraging the exploration of looks-based senses of individual identity, it also allowed – indeed compelled – the formation of communal ties of identification. Andrew Gurr's comprehensive overview of *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* has convincingly demonstrated the social diversity of early modern London's theatergoing public.[40] However, the revelation that, in Steven Mullaney's words, playhouses "were massively attended by Elizabethans from almost all walks of life"[41] has often stood in the way of literary critics' recognition of the possibility that Elizabethan theatergoers might also have *shared* a sense of identity – that they might have identified with one another *as theatergoers*. In a later essay Mullaney reiterates how "remarkably heterogeneous" Shakespeare's audiences were while further extrapolating from this heterogeneity a notion of division whereby spectators were alienated from one another both "in terms of religion" and "other key and incompatible differences."[42] The idea that those people who habitually paid to see plays could not possibly have experienced a sense of shared identity similarly underpins Kathleen McLuskie's assertion that the (scant) surviving historical records of actual theatergoers present us with individuals who "cannot be defined by their consumption of theatre."[43] Such accounts of theatrical spectatorship are restricted by a binaristic logic that views playgoers either as isolated individuals or as an undifferentiated mass. If, in his earlier work, Gurr stressed the heterogeneity of the

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[39] Alisa Solomon, "Great Sparkles of Lust: Homophobia and the Antitheatrical Tradition," in *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theater*, ed. Solomon and Framji Minwalla (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 12-13.

[40] Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[41] Steven Mullaney, "Affective Technologies: Towards an Emotional Logic of the Elizabethan Stage," in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, ed. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 74.

[42] Mullaney, "'Do you see this?' The Politics of Attention in Shakespearean Tragedy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 152.

[43] Kathleen McLuskie, "Figuring the Consumer for Early Modern Drama," in *Rematerializing Shakespeare: Authority and Representation on the Early Modern English Stage*, ed. Bryan Reynolds and William West (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 203.

playgoing public, in a more recent essay cowritten with Karoline Szatek he insists upon its homogeny: "audiences at the early modern theatres from Shakespeare's time up to the closure of 1642 were different from modern spectators" in that "they behaved as crowds, *not* as individuals."[44] Amy Rogers takes issue with Gurr and Szatek's pronouncement, showing how "within early modern discourse about theatergoers, the individual 'spectator' begins taking on greater form and clarity."[45] Implicit in Rogers's study of early modern spectatorship is that rather than either/or it is a case of both/and: the evidence suggests that theater people identified, and were identified as, both individuals and a community; like the body politic, the body theatrical contained many bodies in one.

But how best to characterize such a body? Rather than understanding theatergoers as forming a "community" – a term that implies stability, and clear boundaries – my dissertation approaches those early modern Londoners who habitually frequented London's playhouses as members of a looks-based subculture. As defined by Sarah Thornton, subcultures are social groups that are "*perceived* to deviate from the normative ideals of adult communities" and hence "are often positioned by themselves and/or others as deviant and debased."[46] In an essay on "The Subcultures of the Renaissance World," David Gentilcore echoes Thornton's emphasis on perception: "Subcultures were as much a question of how people perceived themselves as how they were perceived by others."[47] Late Elizabethan theatergoers were certainly "perceived" as "deviant and debased" by antitheatricalists like Henry Crosse, who viewed the "common haunters" of theaters as "the leaudest persons of the land, apt for pilferie, perjeurie, forgerie, or any rogories, the very scum, rascality, and baggage of the people, thieves, cut-purses, shifters, cousoners; briefly, an unclean generation."[48] In the chapters that follow I explore how this "unclean *generation*" – "Family, breed; (also) a sort or kind of person"[49] – was imagined, and addressed, by antitheatricalists and playwrights in ways both conflicting and complementary.

Although Gentilcore does not mention theaters and focuses instead on national, religious, and occupational subcultures, his essay offers a useful starting point for considering the workings of an early modern subculture of theatergoers.[50] Significantly. Gentilcore highlights "the difficulties inherent in determining the boundaries of subcultures"[51] and explains how "individuals might inhabit more than one subculture at once."[52] Several scholars have posited the existence of subcultural groupings within the

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[44] Andrew Gurr and Caroline Szatek, "Women and Crowds at the Theater," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 21 (2008), 157; my emphasis.
[45] Amy Rogers, *A Monster with a Thousand Hands: The Discursive Spectator in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 82.
[46] Sarah Thornton, "General Introduction," in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (London: Routledge, 1997), 2-4; my emphasis.
[47] David Gentilcore, "The Subcultures of the Renaissance World" in *Worlds of the Renaissance*, 300.
[48] Henry Crosse, *Virtue's Commonwealth* (London, 1603), Q1r.
[49] "generation, n.," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/77521 (accessed 7 May 2023).
[50] Curiously, despite omitting theater from his study, Gentilcore alludes to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* when he concludes that while "some" individuals "might choose their subculture," some "had it more or less thrust upon them" (Gentilcore, 312. Cf. Malvolio's encounter with the letter demanding he "be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em." *Twelfth Night*, 2.5.139-41). The vexed question of agency – of the extent of the individual's active volition regarding their subcultural participation – is central to attempts by playwrights and antitheatricalists to conceptualize the experiences and identities of their contemporary theatergoers. From their plays and pamphlets theatergoing emerges as a practice both of volition and of compulsion, an exercise of control and a loss of control.
[51] Gentilcore, 303.
[52] Ibid, 307.

theatergoing community – for example, young male apprentices, or female spectators.[53] Without contesting these illuminating accounts of the various bonds that potentially united (or distinguished between) habitual playgoers (affiliations along lines of class, gender, occupation, and so on), I propose that such sub-groupings within the playgoing population comprised a broader subcultural phenomenon. Accounts of different subcultural groupings within the theater need not conflict with the idea of subcultural affiliation across the theater. Rather, such a both/and approach is essential when confronting the multi-layered complexity of the late Elizabethan theatergoing community, "an unclean generation" of boundary crossers (who crossed boundaries both geographical and cultural) comprising a totality that resists any singular definition. Predicated as it was on deviance, boundary crossing, and category confusion, this subculture of theatergoers was profoundly queer.

Literature review

Early modern audience studies flourished in the last century, with a rich variety of critical approaches aimed at uncovering who frequented London's commercial theaters, what they experienced when they were there, and even, more tentatively, *why* they wanted to go to the playhouse in the first place. My dissertation is situated at the intersection of these various approaches, building upon the findings and theories of previous scholars in the field. One simple question dominated the first few decades of audience studies: "Who were the people for whom Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, Webster, and their fellow dramatists wrote plays?"[54] Alfred Harbage's *Shakespeare's Audience* (1944) was followed by several significant investigations by E. K. Chambers, Ann Cook, and Gurr.[55] Despite their shared demographic orientation, such scholars have reached radically different conclusions regarding the socioeconomic make-up of late Elizabethan playhouse populations. What has become the consensus view was first established by Harbage: *everyone* – high and low, rich and poor, male and female – was (at least potentially) a playgoer. Yet the central piece of evidence upon which Harbage's thesis depends – that the one-penny groundling admission fee made theatergoing accessible to the lower orders – is used by Cook to argue the reverse. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Cook contends, a penny was actually a lot of money: only "privileged playgoers" – a group comprised of "the nobility, the gentry, the wealthier merchants, and the professionals

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[53] See Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle* (London: Routledge, 1994), 74-93; Howard, "Women as Spectators, Spectacles, and Paying Customers" in *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History, and Performance, 1594-1998*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1998), 81-86; and Johann Gregory and Alice Leonard, "Assuming Gender in *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Cressida*: 'Are we to assume that there were women in the audience?'", *Assuming Gender* 1, vol. 2 (2010), 44-61. While such scholars do not explicitly conceive of these different social groupings as subcultures, a subcultural dynamic is implicit in their emphasis on the potential *deviance* of those apprentices or women who habitually attended the theater (shirking off work; flouting patriarchal norms concerning female in/visibility). On (non-theatrical) renaissance female subcultures see Gentilcore, 309-11.

[54] Anne Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 3.

[55] Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare's Audience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941); E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 4 vols.; Cook, *Privileged Playgoers*; Gurr, *Playgoing*. As their titles suggest, these studies tended to think about the composition of early modern audiences primarily in relation to Shakespearean plays and playing spaces. More recently, however, some critics have sought to bring attention to the spectators of pre- and post-Shakespearean drama, or the plays of (now) less famous contemporary dramatists. See, for example, the web-based project *Before Shakespeare: The Beginnings of London Commercial Theatre, 1565-1595*, https://beforeshakespeare.com, and Andy Kesson, "Playhouses, Plays, and Theater History: Rethinking the 1580s," *Shakespeare Studies* 45 (2017), 19-40.

(advocates, clerics, teachers, military officers, and an occasional physician) together with their wives and children" – could afford such a diversion.[56] In terms curiously reminiscent of early modern antitheatrical literature, Cook provocatively insists that playgoing "was much above the reach of the poorer sort," for "on weekday afternoons, with most decent, ordinary folk hard at work, only the idle, the criminal, or the irresponsible could join the privileged at a play."[57] Ultimately, both Gurr's and Cook's theses risk encouraging an oversimplification of the early modern theatergoing demographic, either by painting this population in strokes too broad (everyone was a playgoer) or too narrow ("privileged playgoers" only).[58] Nevertheless, these critics have played an invaluable role in issuing (and continuing to sound) a clarion call to approach the individuals who attended plays as subjects worthy of serious scholarly attention. Before Harbage's landmark study, Jonson's derision towards and (apparent) dismissal of his plays' spectators as an undifferentiated mob, a "many-headed bench"[59] and "drunken rout,"[60] echoed down the centuries, adopted by readers of early modern drama as diverse as Lewis Theobald and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[61]

As investigations into the 'real' identities of early modern theatergoers achieved increasing prominence within renaissance drama studies, some scholars began to tackle the question of how these individuals might have responded to (or, as I shall argue is more appropriate terminology, might have *experienced*) the plays they attended. Thinking about the material conditions governing playing has been the primary goal of the majority of recent audience-focused critics. Their studies – dazzlingly diverse and varied, but commonly united under the banner of "historical phenomenology" – insist on the possibility, indeed necessity, of "projecting ourselves into the historically reconstructed field of perception as far as we are able."[62] Gail Kern Paster's pioneering *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (1993), which explores how theories of the humoral body were at the heart of renaissance physiology and psychology in order to explain "the role of theater in inculcating the disciplines of bodily technique and affective self-regulation,"[63] heralded an explosion of interest in historicizing processes of subjective embodiment. Influenced by Paster, some critics continued to investigate early modern experiences of embodiment in terms of "affective" systems like "the passions" or "emotions."[64]

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[56] Cook, *Privileged Playgoers*, 16.
[57] Ibid, 271.
[58] Several other studies either argue for a narrowly rarefied theatergoing public (like Cook) or focus on a particular subset of the playgoing population. See, for example, Michael Neill, "'Wit's Most Accomplished Senses': The Audience of the Caroline Private Theaters," *Studies in English Language* 18 (1978), 341-60; Richard Levin, "Women in the Renaissance Theater Audience," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989), 165-74; and Mary Blackstone and Louis Cameron, "Towards 'A Full and Understanding Auditory': New Evidence of Playgoers at the First Globe Theater," *Modern Language Review* 90 (1995), 556-71.
[59] Ben Jonson, "To the Worthy Author M. *Iohn Fletcher*," in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (London: Penguin Books, 1975), line 13.
[60] Jonson, "Apologetical dialogue" appended to *Poetaster, or, The Arraignment*, ed. M.J. Kidnie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), line 210.
[61] Theobald lamented the "barbarism" of Elizabethan audiences while Coleridge branded them "vulgar." For the full versions of these assessments, and a comprehensive account of how this attitude of breezy condescension towards early modern spectators persisted well into the twentieth century, see Moody Prior, "The Elizabethan Audience and the Plays of Shakespeare," *Modern Philology* 49.2 (1951), 101-23.
[62] Bruce Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 28.
[63] Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 279.
[64] See *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary-Floyd Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Bridget Escolme,

The phenomenological imperative to study spectatorship in terms of embodiment, affect, and feeling has also spurred on "the so-called cognitive turn in theatre and performance studies."[65] Analyzing theatergoing alongside insights drawn from cognitive science and philosophy, Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart characterize spectatorship as a process of "empathetic observation," "a mode of cognitive engagement involving mirror neurons in the mind/brain" which prompt "spectators to replicate the emotions of a performer's physical state without experiencing that physical state directly."[66] According to this model, the "feedback loop of spectating"[67] must also work in reverse, on actors too – especially so on early modern stages whose actors, unlike those behind a proscenium arch, looked back at spectators – thus destabilizing any looker/looked-at, doer/done-to hierarchy.

Other critics have taken a sensory turn, working with Bruce Smith's conviction that "texts not only represent bodily experience; they imply it in the ways they ask to be touched, seen, heard, even smelled and tasted."[68] Like my dissertation, which focuses above all on sight, the majority of these studies are organized around a single sense,[69] yet they are also responsive to Holly Dugan's prescription that "what we have learned about each of the sensory modes" can only be understood via "further study of their interrelatedness."[70]

Emotional Excess on the Shakespearean Stage: Passion's Slaves (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Allison Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Steven Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[65] John McGavin and Greg Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship: From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 5. McGavin and Walker adopt a hybrid approach, placing insights provided by cognitive science in dialogue with traditionally historicist materials, in order to offer an account of medieval and early modern spectatorship that they admit (refreshingly unapologetically) "must be essentially speculative, an imaginative engagement with the surviving evidence" (4). See also Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare's Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Amy Cook, *Shakespearean Neuroplay: Reinvigorating the Study of Dramatic Texts and Performance Through Cognitive Science* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and John Sutton and Evelyn B. Tribble, *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[66] Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart, "Introduction" in *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*, ed. Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 7. While not denying "the varying historical contingencies that structure people's bodies and minds," McConachie and Hart contend that since "the human species shares minds/brains that are fundamentally alike," we "can assume some common mental processes for all people over time" (8).

[67] Ibid, 8.

[68] Bruce Smith, "Premodern Sexualities," *PMLA*, 115.3 (2000), 325-6.

[69] The following (by no means exhaustive) list attests to the kaleidoscopic range of sensory approaches to spectatorship: Marcus Norland, *The Dark Lantern: A Historical Study of Sight in Shakespeare, Webster, and Middleton* (Gothenburg: Parajett, 1999); Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999); Wes Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2002); *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Harvey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Jonathan Gil Harris, "The Smell of *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58.4 (2007); Holly Dugan, "Scent of a Woman: Performing the Politics of Smell in Early Modern England," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38.2 (2008); Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); *Who Hears in Shakespeare? Auditory Worlds on Stage and Screen*, eds. Laury Magnus and Walter Cannon (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012); Sally Templeman, "'What's this? Mutton?': Food, Bodies, and Inn-Yard Performance Spaces in Early Shakespearean Drama," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 31.1 (2013).

[70] Dugan, "Shakespeare and the Senses," *Literature Compass* 6.3 (2009), 734. For essay collections embracing a multisensory approach, see *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern*

Indeed, French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty insisted that the senses are not simply interrelated but blended and confused: "synaesthetic perception is the rule, and if we do not notice it, this is because … we have unlearned seeing, hearing, and sensing in general."[71] As Rodgers demonstrates, early modern antitheatricalists "imagine this sensory intermingling as a sort of malaise fostered by the theater," with the individual's experience of synaesthesia producing "an encounter that allows for a vertiginous loss of self in a somatic tangle, one they fear the spectator finds uniquely pleasurable."[72] Although I argue that sight, and sights, were at the heart of theatergoing's subcultural appeal, my dissertation simultaneously bears witness to the impossibility, for antitheatricalists and playwrights alike, of keeping the senses separate. On the contrary, these early modern writers exploit synaesthetic confusion for rhetorical and theatrical impact. As if directly engaging Gosson's warning that, at the playhouse, "that which entereth into us by the eyes and ears must be digested by the spirit" and "maketh us stink in the sight of God,"[73] Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* works to provoke soteriological anxiety in its spectators by encouraging their sensory uncertainty surrounding sights and sounds while enveloping them in the sulphurous (gunpowder SFX-derived) smell of hell. Subsequent chapters explore how Jonson's scatological concept of theater invites spectators to smell, and even taste, the enemy playwrights he stages in all their abject to-be-looked-at-ness; and how the tactility of looks in *Troilus and Cressida* is so intense that the eye itself becomes an agent in the transmission of venereal disease.

One final group of studies that have been indispensable in developing my own account of early modern theatergoing adopt what Rodgers describes as a "discursive" approach in her *A Monster with a Thousand Heads: The Discursive Spectator in Early Modern England*. Rodgers's work stands as a useful corrective to the common critical assumption that the conceptual "birth of the spectator" is a twentieth-century phenomenon.[74] As Rodgers demonstrates, "whereas formal theoretical approaches to and detailed statistics about spectatorship may be the domain of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, discourses on the topic are not."[75] Although Rodgers insists that hers is "not a study of the phenomenological audiences of early modern England but rather of the culturally constructed figure of the spectator," her work nevertheless "does concern real audiences: one of its central claims is that cultural discourses about entertainment spectatorship play a significant (and undertheorized) role in shaping individual and cultural interpretive practice and affective response."[76] I wholeheartedly agree with this assertion, but I would add that Rodgers's formula also works in reverse: "cultural discourses about entertainment spectatorship" are themselves influenced and shaped over time by the behaviours of 'real' theatergoers, as observed in particular by playwrights and (both pro- and anti-theatrical) cultural commentators.

England, eds. Katharine Craik and Tanya Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and *Shakespeare/ Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture*, ed. Simon Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). See also Jennifer Rae McDermott, "Shakespeare in Another Sense: A Study of Physical and Textual Perception in Four Plays" (doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2012).

[71] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 238. In the early modern context, Carla Mazzio argues that touch plays the pivotal role in "disrupting the boundaries between the senses themselves." Carla Mazzio, "Acting with Tact: Touch and Theater in the Renaissance" in *Sensible Flesh*, 179.

[72] Rodgers, 43.

[73] Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, B8v.

[74] Michelle Aaron, *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking On* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 3.

[75] Rodgers, *Monster*, 3.

[76] Ibid, 15.

Published several years before Rodgers's monograph, but similarly concerned with the textually constructed *idea* of the spectator, Jeremy Lopez's *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* self-consciously adopts a heterodox approach:

> The prevailing orthodoxy at least since Alfred Harbage's *Shakespeare's Audience* has been that one can better understand the plays of the English Renaissance if one better understands their audiences. In this book I want to suggest something different: that one can better understand the audiences of the English Renaissance if one better understands the plays they watched.[77]

While I certainly share Lopez's sense that "the plays they watched" constitute a treasure trove of information about early modern theatergoers, his argument depends even more than Rodgers's on the idea of a unidirectional shaping power whereby purely passive spectators are reduced to a singular entity – the "audience" – which is moulded by what it sees onstage. According to Lopez, not only does any given play seem "to be very sure of the response it wants from its audience as a whole at any given moment"[78] – it also gets it. So, for example, when Polonius interrupts the Player's speech in *Hamlet* ("This is too long" [2.2.456]), "The audience, having been taught that nothing Polonius says can be taken seriously, laughs."[79] Lopez's study does much to underscore the extent to which early modern playwrights wrote with their spectators in mind, and explore how they conceived of this theatergoing community more broadly.[80] Nevertheless, his totalizing notion of "audience response" – where first a play does something to an audience and they then all react to it in exactly the same way – is both temporally and agentially insufficient to account for the attentive and affective exchanges which took place between actors and spectators in early modern theaters. Just as spectators were influenced by what they saw enacted onstage (and off), their looks impacted on the actors and shaped their performances. Such interactions could be simultaneous as well as sequential. Moreover, by the end of the sixteenth century professional playwrights like Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson were writing for open-air amphitheaters whose volatile and various looking relations were well-established. As my dissertation explores, such looking relations were not only thematized in the plays but also impacted how the playwrights – and their paying customers – came to conceive of identity and selfhood.

Chapter outlines

Above all, the multiplicity and reciprocity of playhouse looks created a theatergoing experience predicated on an intense physical immediacy: of actors to spectators, spectators to actors, actors to actors, and spectators to spectators. This was a theater of immersive participation for everyone involved. As appealing as such an experience was, it was also

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[77] Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

[78] Ibid, 8.

[79] Ibid, 14. But what if an individual spectator feels – as I do – that Polonius is right? The speech *is* too long!

[80] Consider this insightful rendering of the playwright-spectator relationship:

> [The audience] enjoyed thinking of themselves and being thought of as a collective entity, whose collective response quite powerfully determined the value of a play. And above all they enjoyed – and playwrights enjoyed them – *responding,* visibly, audibly, and physically: the transparent self-reflexivity of the language and the dramaturgy, like the relative bareness of the stage and brightness of the theatre, would have made this both inevitable and essential. (Lopez, *Audience Response*, 34).

The crowd at a theater were never *just* a "collective entity," however, but also a group of distinct individuals; to deny the resulting oscillation between feelings of belonging and a sense of standing out tells only half the story.

potentially dangerous. For their part, early modern antitheatricalists abhorred theater because they saw it as the gateway to hell. According to them, the price of admission to the playhouse was "the state of everlasting damnation."[81] At issue was not only what spectators saw enacted onstage, but also their *being seen* – and seen, no less, by the all-seeing Himself. As Thomas Beard warns in *The Theatre of God's Judgement*, nothing is more "odious and irksome in the sight of the Lord"' than a theatrical congregation.[82] However, while most antitheatricalists assume like Beard that God is always looking, seeing *everything*, Munday equivocates:

> Can God cast his gracious countenance upon such as rage in circles, and play the harlots in theaters? Or is this our meaning, and do we think it meet, that forsomuch as God seeth us in circles and theaters, that what things we see, he beholdeth; and what filthiness we look on, he seeth it also for company? For one of these must needs be: for *if* he vouchsafe to look upon us, it followeth that he must behold all those things where we are: or *if*, which is most true, he turn away his eyes from those things, he must likewise turn his countenance from us who are there.[83]

Either, by looking *at* theatergoers, God is (strangely) compelled to look *with* them, corrupting His field of vision with the "filthiness" they "look on," or, even worse, God "turn[s] away" completely, damning the theatrical congregation by *not looking* at them at all. For all Munday's insistence that the second option is "most true," the lingering "ifs" cast doubt over his assertion – and perhaps such uncertainty is the point, for both prospects are terrifying.

My first chapter, on Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, explores how theater might have appealed to those who, like the play's eponymous hero, felt ignored by an unresponsive Calvinist God who no longer looked their way. Like the antitheatricalists, Marlowe positions theatergoing as a devilish alternative to churchgoing. Whereas Faustus's prayers to God and/or Christ are always left unanswered, the devils never fail to respond. With Mephistopheles by his side, Faustus becomes a travelling player, their performances bringing the doctor the attentions of humans and devils in place of those of God. Faustus does not only receive attention, but also gives attention – his theater thrives on mutual regard and mutual gratification. Denied *any* relationship with God, it seems that Faustus can have *every* kind of relationship in the theater. In particular, the intensely homoerotic nature of the relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles speaks to Marlowe's broader conception of theater as a space where a queer variety of desires can be explored and satisfied. Theater's queerness also depends on a spirit of openness and inclusivity prohibited by contemporary religion. In line with the Manichean exclusivism of reformed theology, only the "godly" – those predestined to salvation – were welcome in the church community. The doors of the theater, on the other hand, were open to everyone.

Yet, as Marlowe's play insists, the doors of the theater might also lead an individual to hell. Why would Elizabethan spectators risk the fate of their immortal souls by attending performances of *Faustus*? I argue that the play's phenomenal popularity was a result of its invitation to spectators to *join in* with the action. Both the text of the play and its original performance conditions immersed spectators in the same visual and aural confusion that mark Faustus out as reprobate. By inflaming spectators' anxieties concerning their own

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[81] Munday, 93.

[82] Thomas Beard, *The Theatre of God's Judgements* (London, 1597), 375. William Prynne suggests that the divinity's attentions are focused above all on the players and the debauchery they "continually practice on the stage, without blush of face, or sorrow of heart, not only in the open view of men, but even of that all-eyed God." William Prynne, *Histriomastix: The Player's Scourge* (London, 1633), 171.

[83] Munday, 4-5; my emphases.

sensory confusion, the play encourages them to engage in the kind of soteriological self-scrutiny – the searching for signs of one's election or reprobation – that contributes to Faustus's psychological disintegration. At the same time that *Faustus* provokes the urge to self-scrutiny the play also highlights – and creates the conditions for – the practice of searching for signs of election or reprobation in others. The play's "sensory dramaturgy"[84] – including the prolific use of gunpowder, the sulphurous odour of which "was a stinking sign of diabolical activity" in medieval and early modern England[85] – finally transports spectators to the very bowels of hell. If Marlowe's play gleefully confirms that theatergoing is indeed the first step on the highway to hell, it also sheds light on why playgoers might thus endanger their souls. Afforded the opportunity to make a spectacle of themselves, and each other, throughout the duration of the performance, playgoers were able to give and receive the kind of attention that the lonely Faustus so longs for. In this way, a play long renowned for its devastating depiction of one man's lonely desolation ultimately created conditions enabling a fleeting experience of communal mutual regard.

My first chapter examines the appeal of theater to playgoers: how the webs of mutual regard that formed between actors and spectators during performances created an experience of intense physical immediacy and immersive participation for all involved. My second chapter, on Jonson's *Poetaster*, asks: what happens to the Author in the theater? I argue that playwriting, as much as playgoing, is presented as a symptom of an almost compulsive desire to be looked at. Critics often approach Jonson as an antitheatrical playwright – and not without good reason. Jonson railed endlessly about the indignity of his having to present his works before ignorant and unruly audiences; *Poetaster*, more than any of Jonson's plays, is riddled with anxieties concerning the shameful self-exposure involved in being "known unto the open stage" (1.2.60). In stigmatizing the *openness* of playmaking Jonson aligns himself with the antitheatricalists who time and time again deride the "open theater"; "open theaters"; the "open shameless behaviour" of theatergoers; the "open corruption" on display at the playhouse; and so on, ad infinitum.[86] Yet by explicitly staging avatars of himself and other contemporary theater personalities in *Poetaster*, Jonson renders himself more open to view than ever. *Poetaster* ultimately suggests that to be subjected to the theatergoing public's eyes is to be penetrated by those eyes – and yet Jonson simply cannot refrain from staging himself for those eyes, both in this play and throughout his career. Seeking to complexify and queer existing accounts of Jonson's antitheatrical bent, I read *Poetaster* as an ambivalent account of the masochistic pleasures provided by public acts of self-abasement in early modern playhouses.

While *Poetaster* explores the relationship between a writer and his public, the play also focuses on the bonds between writers. I argue that a patrilineal model of literary genealogy is too orderly and stable to account for relations between writers in *Poetaster*, relations that blur penetrative as well as temporal hierarchies and distinctions. Jonson offers an alternative model based on a mutually-penetrative homoerotics of artistic genealogy and community. The "mutual love"[87] between poets that the play posits as the telos of artistic creation depends on Jonson's *openness* to other writers, but also on his *cruising* them. in *Poetaster* Jonson explores a "cruisy relation with the past," a kind of relation proposed by Bromley in his essay on "Cruisy Historicism." Bromley explains that the historicism he

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[84] Hristomir Stanev, *Sensory Experience and the Metropolis on the Jacobean Stage* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 1.
[85] Harris, "The Smell of *Macbeth*," 475.
[86] Northbrooke, 61; Gosson, *School of Abuse*, F2r; Munday, 89; Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, G6v.
[87] Jonson, *Poetaster*, 3.1.236. Subsequent quotations from the play will be cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.

proposes "is 'cruisy' not only because it offers a reading of representations of cruising, but also because it derives its methodology from those representations":

> As an embodied practice, cruising entails shuttling back and forth and surveying a scene for erotic opportunities and interested partners. Translating the corporeal and phenomenological to the epistemological, the peripatetics of cruising offer a useful model for how we might permit conceptual and temporal shifts when considering a reader's textual encounter with the past and attending to his or her location in the present.[88]

Poetaster is finally an exercise for Jonson in "shuttling back and forth" and "surveying" the literary "scene" for explicitly homoeroticized encounters between literary figures.

If *Poetaster* is in part a depiction of – and an opportunity for – writers cruising one another for artistic inspiration, Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* shows *everyone* joining in with the action. While my first two chapters touch on theater's responsiveness to, and inclusion of, queer desires, my final chapter offers a more thoroughgoing account of the fundamental *queerness* of early modern theatrical looking, a phenomenon comprised not of a singular gaze but rather a dense web of looks whose bearers continually shifted between (and thus dismantled) polar positions like subject/object, looker/looked-at, male/female, and fictional/real. *Troilus and Cressida* stages a veritable *mise on abyme* of spectatorship, with characters constantly commenting on their own, and others, looks. Shakespeare explores how the frisson of unpredictability and possibility emanating from this profusion of looks is central to theater's erotic charge. Its offer of the potential thrill of queer gazing, and queer cruising – finding and locking "wanton eyes" with a "mate" in the crowd, as Stubbes imagines, and returning home with them to "plaie the *Sodomits*" – undoubtedly contributed at least in part to the popularity of a commercial theater which necessarily had to please and cater to a variety of tastes and inclinations.

Beyond cruising for sex, I argue that in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare considers further dimensions of the theater's appeal as a space in which paying customers could indulge in the pleasure of being looked at – and even cultivate their own public persona. The demographics of the theater industry in early modern London – a small number of professional actors in a handful of theaters staging plays for a few thousand habitual spectators – created a system wherein Gurr suggests "the players were more familiar to their audiences as themselves, star players, than as the characters they portrayed."[89] Taking Gurr's contention to its logical conclusion, if the players were instantly recognizable to the playgoers, the playgoers – comprising a small portion of the population returning to the theater again and again – must equally have been recognizable to the players, and to each other, *as theater people*. The commercial theater, that much-lamented "place of licentiousnesse," was a venue to which "the gallants of the kingdom flocke[d] to see, *and to be seen*, and not all to good ends."[90] Some people went to the theater not, primarily, to watch the onstage play at all, but rather to perform for their fellow playgoers. *Troilus and Cressida* explores how theaters thus functioned as spaces in which actors and spectators alike – perhaps better thought of collectively as actor-spectators, given the ever-shifting instability of these positions – could engage in a 'publishing' of their own (or another's) identity and work to build an early modern social network, forging bonds of recognition and attraction not only transgressing the line between stage and auditorium but also

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[88] James Bromley, "Cruisy Historicism: Sartorial Extravagance and Public Sexual Culture in Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 16.2 (2016), 21-22.
[89] Gurr, *Playgoing*, 126.
[90] William Harrison, *A Prohibition* (London, 1618). Folger Shakespeare Library MS V.a. 244, fol. 78-79; my emphases.

extending (just as the antitheatricalists feared) far beyond the walls of the theater itself, into the outside world.

1. "In this show let me an actor be": Joining in with *Doctor Faustus*

Theater is a fundamentally collaborative artform. Any successful live performance depends upon the participation of – and cooperation between – actors and spectators. On the Elizabethan stage, this axiom was most famously pronounced by the Chorus in William Shakespeare's *Henry V*. The Chorus begins the play by making an apology that doubles as an appeal for help. Because the company doesn't have a *real* "kingdom for a stage, princes to act, / And monarchs to behold the swelling scene," the Chorus begs spectators not only to forgive "The flat unraised spirits that hath dared / On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth / So great an object" as the triumph at Agincourt, but also to assist the performers by imaginatively bridging the gap between illusion and reality: "Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts."[91] While it is the job of the actors to "work" *on* the "imaginary forces" of spectators by staging the play, spectators in turn must work *with* the actors: "For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings" (Prologue.18-28). Yet as much as the Chorus unites actors and spectators in a collaborative endeavour, he also draws clear boundaries between their respective contributions ("*your* thoughts"; "*our* kings"). Where the actors' job is to physically create the theatrical illusion, the spectators' labor is mental: "Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege" (3.0.25). Where the actors play their parts onstage, the role of the spectator is confined to the mind – "the quick forge and working-house of thought" (5.0.23). Actors pretend; spectators believe.

Such a model of theatrical exchange obviously appealed to early modern playgoers: *Henry V* was one of the most popular plays of the period. At the same time, however, another blockbuster mainstay of the Elizabethan stage offered theatergeors a very different kind of experience, one that thoroughly destabilized the distinctions – between actor and spectator, illusion and reality – upon which Shakespeare's Chorus relies. On several different occasions (that we know of), performances of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* were interrupted – and even cut short – by the intervention of apparently supernatural forces. In one account, the "visible apparition of the Devill" appeared "on the stage at the Belsavage Play-house, in Queene Elizabeths days, (to the great amazement *both of Actors and Spectators*) whiles they were there prophanely playing the History of Faustus."[92] Another contemporary report recalls the same phenomenon occurring in a different theater:

> Certaine Players at Exeter, acting upon the stage the tragical storie of Dr Faustus the Conjurer; as a certaine nomber of Devels kept everie one his circle there, and as Faustus was busie in his magicall invocations, on a sudden they were all dasht, every one harkning other in the eare, for they were all perswaded, there was one devell too many amongst them; and so after a little pause desired the people to pardon them, they could go no further with this matter; the people also understanding the thing as it was, every man hastened to be first out of dores. The players (as I heard it) contrarye to their custome spending the night in reading and in prayer got them out of town the next morning.[93]

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[91] William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. T.W. Craik (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 1995), Prologue.3-23. Subsequent quotations from the play will be cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.
[92] Prynne, *Histriomastix*, 177; my emphasis.
[93] Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 3:424.

Critics have tended to dismiss such testimonies as little more than the scattered fragments of "a curious *mythos,*" the superstitious excesses of a world not yet fully disenchanted.[94] Some have attributed the unexpected cameos made by "visible apparition[s]" to the imaginative "abandon" of spectators fully immersed in the theatrical illusion.[95] Perhaps – but such an explanation tells only half the story. For as we have seen, during performances of *Faustus* it was not just the audience, but rather actors and spectators *collectively*, who witnessed the terrifying appearance of "one devell too many amongst them" (indeed, at Exeter, the actors actually instigated the ensuing panic).[96] The *Henry V* paradigm ("Think, when *we* talk of horses, that *you* see them" [Prologue.26; my emphasis]) falls apart when the actors and spectators *see the same thing*. How did Marlowe's play provoke such a powerful dissolution of the boundary between onstage and offstage worlds, and why was such a theatrical experience so appealing to early modern playgoers?

I begin by showing how the fateful turn that Faustus takes at the beginning of the play – from divinity to magic – is ultimately a turn to theater. The analogy between sorcery and stagecraft was popular amongst Marlowe's contemporaries. From Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* to William Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* early modern plays routinely explore how both magic and theater capitalize on the incantatory power of language and depend on (while blurring) distinctions between illusion and reality. In *Faustus*, Marlowe investigates the socio-psychological appeal of magic/theater to those, like Faustus, grappling with the "harsh and all unpleasant" nature of post-Reformation religious culture (B.5.1.46).[97] Marlowe's God is "cast in an uncompromisingly Calvinist mould":[98] having already segregated the saved (elect) from the damned (reprobate) before the beginning of time, He simply will not respond to Faustus's pleas for mercy or salvation. Tormented by his corresponding lack of agency, and the severing of any reciprocal bonds of affection with God, Faustus finds solace in the interactive and participatory experience of theatrical performance. Of course, Faustus's "Calvinist despair"[99] was by no means universal amongst Marlowe's Protestant contemporaries. As Patrick Collinson has revealed, many people felt empowered by a new religion that was written and spoken in their own English tongue. Alongside fellow members of the godly crew, Calvinists established new forms of sociability and community.[100] Nevertheless, it is equally true, as Adrian Streete suggests, that many other people "found the central tenets of Reformed

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[94] Ibid, 3:423.

[95] See Michael Goldman, for whom "That devil" is "an index of how far Marlowe's original audience felt they had gone in their abandon." "Marlowe and the Histrionics of Ravishment," in *Two Renaissance Mythmakers: Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson,* ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 40.

[96] In her study of sound in *Doctor Faustus* Katherine Brokaw reaches the radically opposed conclusion that Marlowe's play forecloses, rather than provokes, the possibility of the actor's fearful belief: "either the playwright and actors do not fear hell, or the notion that the music in church and theater can destroy souls is demonstrably ludicrous." Katherine Brokaw, *Staging Harmony: Musical and Religious Change in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 167. In my reading neither the actors nor the spectators occupy such a safe satirical vantagepoint from which to consider the religious issues at stake in the play.

[97] This description of Calvinist theology is provided by the Old Man who, encouraging Faustus to repent his sins, admits that his devout "exhortation" sounds "harsh and all unpleasant" (B.5.1.45-46). Quotations from *Doctor Faustus A- and B-texts (1604, 1616),* ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.

[98] Pauline Honderich, "John Calvin and *Doctor Faustus*," *The Modern Language Review* 68.1 (1973), 9.

[99] James Simpson, *Permanent Revolution: The Reformation and the Illiberal Roots of Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2019), 240.

[100] Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 189-241.

theology, especially the Calvinism that dominated late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England, to be a challenge rather than a comfort."[101] Aptly described by G.K. Hunter as a "God-haunted atheist,"[102] Marlowe foregrounds the challenging harshness of Calvinist worship – and offers theater as a (potentially) comforting alternative.

At the beginning of the play Faustus is, first and foremost, an actor seeking attention – and seeking a *response* – from an absent divinity. Whereas Faustus's prayers to God and/or Christ are always left unanswered, the devils never fail to respond. With Mephistopheles by his side, Faustus becomes a travelling player, their performances bringing the doctor the attentions of humans and devils in place of those of God. Faustus does not only receive attention, but also gives attention – his theater thrives on mutual regard and mutual gratification. Denied *any* relationship with God, it seems that Faustus can have *every* kind of relationship in the theater. In particular, the intensely homoerotic nature of the relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles speaks to Marlowe's broader conception of theater as a space where a queer variety of desires can be explored and satisfied. Theater's queerness also depends on a spirit of openness and inclusivity prohibited by contemporary religion. As the "Homily of the Right Use of the Church" frequently reminded Elizabethan churchgoers, "none but godly persons and the true worshippers of God should enter into the temple of God."[103] In line with the Manichean exclusivism of reformed theology, only the "godly" – those predestined to salvation – were welcome in the church community. The doors of the theater, on the other hand, were open to everyone.

In pitting church against theater and highlighting the playhouse's role in the circulation of queer desires, Marlowe provocatively embraces the claim – popular amongst Elizabethan antitheatricalists like Anthony Munday – that the price of admission to the playhouse was "the state of everlasting damnation."[104] Moreover, *Faustus* works to trigger spectators' soteriological anxieties, giving them a taste of living hell. Both the text of the play and its original performance conditions immersed spectators in the same visual and aural confusion that mark Faustus out as reprobate. By inflaming spectators' anxieties concerning their own sensory confusion, the play encourages them to engage in the kind of soteriological self-scrutiny – the searching for signs of one's election or reprobation – that contributes to Faustus's psychological disintegration. At the same time, by aligning the offstage spectators with the onstage devils who approach Faustus's descent into hell as a theatrical spectacle, the paying playgoers' looking itself is framed as inherently diabolical. The play's "sensory dramaturgy"[105] – including prolific use of gunpowder, the sulphurous odour of which "was a stinking sign of diabolical activity" in medieval and early modern England[106] – finally transports spectators to the very bowels of hell.

Why would Elizabethan spectators risk the fate of their immortal souls in attending performances of *Faustus*? I argue that the play's broad appeal lay in its invitation to spectators to join in with the action. Participating in Faustus's damnation via their devilish looking, spectators also got a taste (or a smell) of damnation themselves. Moreover, while

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[101] Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11.
[102] G.K. Hunter, "The Theology of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 27 (1964), 240.
[103] "An Homily of the Right Use of the Church or Temple of God, and of the Reverence Due Unto the Same," in *The Books of Homilies: A Critical Edition*, ed. Gerald Bray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 211.
[104] Munday, *Blast of Retreat*, 93.
[105] Stanev, *Sensory Experience*, 1.
[106] Harris, "The Smell of *Macbeth*," 475.

Faustus provokes the urge to self-scrutiny the play also highlights – and creates the conditions for – the practice of searching for signs of election or reprobation in others. By making a spectacle of themselves, and each other, throughout the duration of the performance, actors and spectators alike engaged in a process of communal mutual regard.

Ultimately *Faustus*'s original spectators not only acted parts in the play but also *co-authored* the text that we have in our own hands today. *Faustus* survives in two versions that seemingly diverge on the finer points of theology. Leah Marcus voices the consensus view that the 1604 A-text presents Faustus's doom in strictly predestinarian terms while the (much longer) 1616 B-text is "less committedly Calvinist" and leaves the possibility of Faustus's repentance open. [107] Agreeing with Marcus's conclusion that the two versions are '"profoundly different,"[108] critics generally state a preference for one over the other – usually, in the pursuit of authorial purity, choosing the earlier A-text on the assumption that it is closer to Marlowe's true copy.[109] However, as I will highlight throughout this chapter, both theologically and dramaturgically the additions and variations of the B-text are remarkably faithful to the supposed 'original' script.[110] More importantly, the B-text manifests the invitation, established by the A-text, to join in with *Faustus*'s diabolical theatrical community. Early modern audiences wanted more of *Faustus*, and theatrical producers came up with a longer version of the same play; the additions and variations are as much a product of playgoers' demands as they are of the jobbing playwrights' pens that wrote them. These eager spectators thus became active collaborators in the play's success; an enduring megahit, Andrew Sofer describes *Faustus* as an "evolving theatrical event."[111] In approaching *Faustus* as a phenomenological process rather than as a single stable script, I will quote freely from both the A-text and the B-text, while remaining ever-attentive to the differences between these two textual occasions. The B-text (and the spectatorial *work* that produced it) might best be understood as a response to Lucifer's invitation to Faustus, before the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, to "mark this show" (A.2.3.104). "Pay attention to the play," Lucifer suggests, "but also *leave your mark* on it."

Are you there God? It's me, Faustus

Although Faustus introduces himself to the audience as a scholar seeking knowledge, what we see on the stage is an actor seeking attention. Faustus's opening monologue firmly establishes his histrionic – and homoerotic – impulses:

Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin
To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess.
Having commenced, be a divine in show,
Yet level at the end of every art,

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[107] Leah Marcus, "Textual Indeterminacy and Ideological Difference: The Case of *Doctor Faustus*," *Renaissance Drama* ns 20 (1989), 3.
[108] Ibid.
[109] David Webb, for example, derides the B-text as "crude and not very consistent about theological aspects of the play," levelling the common charge that it overemphasizes the spectacular "thrills" that "can be squeezed from magic, the Devil, and hell." David Webb, "Damnation in *Doctor Faustus*: Theological Strip Tease and the Histrionic Hero," *Critical Survey* 11.1 (1999), 35-36.
[110] As an overarching example, I contend that the B-text's seemingly anti-predestinarian revisions are nullified and Faustus's reprobation re-emphasized via the amplification of the role of the stage devils. Even more than in the A-text they control Faustus from the start. Their apparent omnipotence is perfectly in keeping with Calvin's understanding of the experience of reprobation – further proof of the B-text's theological continuities with the A-text.
[111] Andrew Sofer, "How to Do Things with Demons: Conjuring Performatives in *Doctor Faustus*," *Theatre Journal* 61.1 (2009), 10.

And live and die in Aristotle's works.
Sweet *Analytics*, 'tis thou hast ravished me! (A.1.1.1-6)

Faustus is an actor – a "divine *in show*" – whose pleasure in finding "the end of every art" involves being "ravished" by (implicitly male) books. His thirst for reading apparently insatiable, Faustus quickly dispenses with Aristotle's "logic," Galen's "physic," and Justinian's "law" (A.1.7-31). The books are not only the objects of Faustus's desire but also physical props that he uses in his performance. Angus Fletcher argues that the "boldness" with which Faustus casts off various "systems of knowledge lends" the play's opening "scene a performative quality, giving the impression not of an actual epiphany, but of a man who is finally acting on a decision that he has long considered."[112] I would add that the scene's very rehearsed-ness suggests that this is a moment that Faustus has been repeating, practising, waiting for an audience to respond to his performance.

The problem for Faustus is that he finds himself acting on the stage of an empty theater, for his target audience – God – is unresponsive, nowhere to be seen. Having performed his rejection of various secular systems of knowledge, Faustus turns to the Christianity he has been trained to revere: "When all is done, divinity is best" (A.1.1.37). And yet turning the pages of "Jerome's Bible" and "view[ing] it well," he finds that he has been rejected by God:

[*He reads.*] *Stipendium peccati mors est.* Ha!
Stipendium, etc.
The reward of sin is death. That's hard.
[*He reads.*] *Si peccasse negamus, fallimur*
Et nulla est in nobis veritas.
If we say that we have no sin,
We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us.
Why then belike we must sin,
And so consequently die.
Ay, we must die an everlasting death.
What doctrine call you this, *Che ser*à, *ser*à,
What will be, shall be? Divinity, adieu! (A.1.1.39-50)

Critics have earnestly debated whether or not Faustus is reading the Bible accurately here,[113] but the dramatic emphasis is on his affective response to the harsh message he

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[112] Angus Fletcher, "'Doctor Faustus' and the Lutheran Aesthetic," *English Literary Renaissance* 35.2 (2005), 191. Akin to Fletcher's comment on the "performative quality" of Faustus's speech, Webb suggests that "the bravura style in which it is all done … smacks of showing off, of self-dramatization" (35).

[113] The biblical passages cited by Faustus appear to be incomplete. The full verse from Romans 6:23 reads "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." In the second citation Faustus likewise omits the soothing concession that "If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). Traditionally these lines have been taken as evidence of Faustus's "wilful self-delusion" (King-Kok Cheung, "The Dialectic of Despair in *Doctor Faustus,*" in *"A Poet and a filthy Play-maker:" New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill, and Constance Kuriyama (New York: AMS Press, 1988), 194) and deliberate "distortion" of scripture (Margaret O'Brien, "Christian Belief in *Doctor Faustus*," *ELH* 37.1 (1970), 3) as the learned doctor "truncates and thereby misreads the verse" (James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 154). However, as Chloe Preedy explains, Faustus may actually be reading *correctly* at the start of the play – at least in terms of the devotional materials disseminated amongst Marlowe's Elizabethan contemporaries:

> In the 1559 Book of Common Prayer ... the quotation from 1 John is used to preface the exhortation to repentance and the Order for General Confession, and is thus separated from the consolatory message of verse 9. In the Thirty-Nine Articles, the fifteenth article likewise ends with the conclusion that 'if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us'; there is no

uncovers therein. His pained reaction to his reading – "That's hard" – may well have resonated with the play's original spectators, who were perhaps themselves coming to terms with the severity of Calvinist Protestantism.

Convinced that he has been cast off forever, Faustus turns to magic in order to get attention – if not from God, then the devils will do. Faustus's replacement of religion with magic thus springs partly from his anxieties concerning the efficacy of prayer in a strictly Calvinist universe.[114] No matter how compelling or worthy an individual performance of prayer was, it could not be guaranteed a divine response. Indeed, as the Puritan writer John Preston advised his anxious readers, any attempt to move God was always-already-futile: "it is not any excellency in the person, nor any fervencie in the prayer, nor any pureness, or holiness that is found in him, *nothing that comes from man*, that causeth his prayer to be acceptable."[115] This God simply didn't respond to prayers. The new theology thus worked to *distance* humans from their Maker. Clifford Leach reminds us that after the eradication of traditional Catholic penitential systems Protestant

> churches had no such clear program to offer the Christian as he had previously known; the terms of God's promise had now rather to be guessed at, were no longer set forth in plain terms by a church whose head was Christ's own vicar. God and his angels were in heaven, afar of; prayers ... had a long way to go.

Crucially, however, although prayers to God "had a long way to go," the human world had not been completely vacated by supernatural forces: "the saints might no longer be there, but the devils abounded."[116] For *Faustus*'s original spectators, Kristen Poole reminds us, "the devil was as real as God – in a way, even more real, since he could be perceived directly even as the omnipresent deity could not."[117]

When considered in the context of a system in which one's spiritual destiny is in the hands of the unfathomable and unresponsive deity, and neither one's own prayers nor those of a priestly intercessor can definitively effect salvation, Faustus's retreat into sorcery emerges as a reaction against the Protestant diminution of Catholic speech acts. By the time the audience first meets him Faustus is *desperate* to have his prayers answered *by anyone*. When he first conjures up the spirit Mephistopheles, Faustus is motivated by a desire to test the efficacy of prayer: he wishes to see "if devils will obey thy hest, / Seeing thou hast prayed and sacrificed to them" (A.1.3.6-7). John Parker points out that Faustus's lengthy Latin incantation (A.1.3.16-23) "would have sounded like a version of the Roman liturgy."[118] Crucially, this is a prayer which is *immediately answered* when Mephistopheles suddenly appears and an overjoyed Faustus proclaims "I see there's virtue in my heavenly words" (A.1.3.28). Ultimately Faustus chooses magic because its "heavenly words," unlike

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> mention of the subsequent verse. (Chloe Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism: Politic Religion and Post-Reformation Polemic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 41-2).

[114] See Jay Zysk, who contends that Faustus turns to magic because he envies the Catholic priest's power to "confect, or make present, Christ's body and blood during the Mass." Faustus therefore "approximates the roles of magician and priest in trying to make his words work efficaciously in the world." Jay Zysk, "The Last Temptation of Faustus: Contested Rites and Eucharistic Representation in *Doctor Faustus*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 43.2 (2013), 139-40. Benjamin Bertram argues more broadly that Faustus turns to magic as a "spiritual alternative to Protestantism" since it provides "a substitute" for the ritual and ceremony previously offered by the Catholic Church. Benjamin Bertram, *The Time is Out of Joint: Skepticism in Shakespeare's England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 112-40.

[115] John Preston, *The saints daily exercise* (London, 1629), 142.

[116] Clifford Leech, *Christopher Marlowe: Poet for the Stage* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), 85.

[117] Kristen Poole, "The Devil's in the Archive: *Doctor Faustus* and Ovidian Physics," *Renaissance Drama* ns 35 (2006), 191.

[118] John Parker, *The Aesthetics of Antichrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 241.

those directed at an impassive God, produce a response. Faustus prays to God and/or Christ *many times* over the course of the play; such prayers invariably fall on deaf ears. The devil, on the other hand, never fails to answer Faustus's calls. Attempting to repent, Faustus cries out in desperation for divine assistance: "Ah, Christ, my Saviour, / Seek to save distressèd Faustus' soul!" (A.2.3.82-3). Instead of Christ, a gang of devils appear, with Lucifer warning that "Christ cannot save thy soul" and reprimanding Faustus because he "talk'st of Christ" (A.2.3.84-91). The B-text's replacement of "talk'st of" with "*call'st on* Christ" (B.2.3.92; my emphasis) is even more direct in presenting Faustus's cry for help as a prayer. Faustus wants to be seen, hear, and *responded to*. Hence the reassurance that he seeks from Mephistopheles regarding the effectiveness of his first performance of a magical incantation: "Did not my conjuring speeches raise thee? Speak" (A.1.3.45). Faustus's investment in audience response – the way that he derives pleasure from the demonstrable effects that the spectacles he stages produce in the people watching them – drives his subsequent magical-theatrical career.

From the pulpit to the "player's stage"

The urge to reciprocal attention-giving, the desire to engage in mutual gazes – no wonder Faustus turns to theater. In the words of the antitheatricalist William Harrison, the playhouse was a "place of licentiousnesse," to which "the gallants of the kingdom flocke[d] *to see, and to be seen*, and not all to good ends." [119] Here, one might object: if all Faustus wants is to look at people, and to be looked at in return, why doesn't he just go to church? Certainly, early modern antitheatricalists and playwrights alike suggested that the church had become a space, like the playhouse, that allowed for the pleasures of self-display and mutual regard. Inveighing against what he saw as the increasing theatricalization of church attendance, Anthony Munday insisted that "every Temple of God" in England had "become a player's stage."[120] In Ben Jonson's *Epicene*, Truewit appeals to Dauphine to "leave to live i' your chamber" and instead "come abroad where the matter is frequent, to court, to tiltings, public shows and feasts, to plays, and church sometimes: thither they come to show their new tires too, to see, and to be seen."[121]

Like the playgoer, the churchgoer could be conceived of both as a spectator and as an actor. On the one hand, John Calvin imagined the individual worshipper as an attentive observer of the "lively and natural images" of "Baptisme and the Lords supper, and other ceremonies wherewith [their] eies ought both … earnestly to be occupied" and "lively to be moved."[122] On the other hand, Ramie Targoff argues that William Tyndale's

> *Exposition of Matthew* marks the initial articulation of what evolves into an evaluative system that relied upon the external body for determining sincerity and hypocrisy at prayer. Within the context of public prayer, the worshiper's physical posture, the tone of her words, and the nature of her expression, came to determine her devotional state. By the early seventeenth century, to pray in the English church meant always to perform.[123]

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[119] Harrison, *A Prohibition*, 78-79; my emphasis.
[120] Munday, 77-8.
[121] Ben Jonson, *Epicene, or, The Silent Woman*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.1.49-54.
[122] John Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London, 1599), 22.
[123] Ramie Targoff, "The Performance of Prayer: Sincerity and Theatricality in Early Modern England," *Representations* 60 (1997), 57.

The potential (con)fusion of theater and church was certainly a source of anxious debate in post-reformation England where, as Daniel Swift notes, "in attempting to isolate the theater from liturgy the laws betray the deep complicity between these two forms."[124]

Yet while the analogy between churching and theatergoing is compelling, by overemphasizing the resemblances between the two performance practices we risk losing sight of how assemblies of early modern actor-spectators would have understood the giving and receiving of attention *differently* in each location. Such differences might in turn illuminate the specific appeal of theatergoing to early modern Londoners. *The Second Book of Homilies* reads in part like a series of stage directions for both the preacher and the members of the congregation. The homilies are prefaced by "An Admonition to All Ministers Ecclesiastical," a pep-talk containing advice on how best "to *show* both faithfulness and prudence" in performing their offices. Attention is paid to both the bodily comportment of the preachers, who are instructed "gravely and reverently to minister [the] holy sacraments," and their vocal delivery, as they are directed to "plainly and distinctly … read the sacred Scriptures" to parishioners. They are also advised on how to avoid boring their audiences: "where the homily may appear too long for one reading" they may – at their own "discretion" – "divide the same to be read part in the forenoon and part in the afternoon."[125]

The "Admonition" thus frames preaching as a theatrical event in which the "Ministers Ecclesiastical" of England are the principal actors, the individuals upon whom all eyes and ears must be fixed throughout the performance. At the same time, however, the parishioners are also figured as performers. The "Homily of the Right Use of the Church" (the first in the volume) begins by excoriating the rise of "much uncomely and unreverent behaviour of many persons" during church services. Such comportment is not simply disruptive, but sacrilegious, the homilist warns, citing King Solomon's understanding of the church building as a stage where the individual Christian performs before God: "'What am I that I should be able to build thee an house, O Lord? But yet for this purpose only it is made that thou mayst regard the prayer of thy servant and his humble supplication.'"[126] Yet the (*absent*) presence of this divine gaze, the homilist complains, is failing to prevent the "contempt" shown by churchgoers who

> do not only speak words swiftly and rashly before the Lord (which they be here forbidden) but also oftentimes speak filthily, covetously and ungodly, talking of matters scarce honest or fit for the alehouse or tavern in the house of the Lord, *little considering that they speak before God*.[127]

These worshippers not only risk assaulting God's ears by contravening the (paradoxical) demand for "silence in talk and words," but also might offend His eyes with their "gesture and behaviour," their "uncomely walking and jetting up and down and overthwart the church."[128] Such attention-seeking in speech and action is the precise inverse of what the homilist requires of "the people and multitude":

> the temple is prepared for them to be hearers rather than speakers, considering that as well the Word of God is there read or taught, whereunto they are bound to give diligent ear will all reverence and silence, as also that common prayer and thanksgiving are rehearsed and said by the public minister in the name of the people

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[124] Daniel Swift, *Shakespeare's Common Prayers: The Book of Common Prayer and the Elizabethan Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 49-50.
[125] *The Books of Homilies*, 204; emphasis mine.
[126] Ibid, 205.
[127] Ibid, 213; my emphasis.
[128] Ibid.

> and the whole multitude present, whereunto they giving their ready audience should assent, and should say 'Amen', as Saint Paul teacheth in the first epistle to the Corinthians; and in another place: 'Glorifying God with one spirit and mouth' which cannot be when every man and woman, in severate pretence of devotion, prayeth privately, one asking, another giving thanks, another reading doctrine, and forceth not to hear the common prayer of the minister.[129]

Throughout the performance of preaching there is no room for individualized, "severate" response or interaction – the parishioners are limited to the expression, "'with one spirit and mouth,'" of a uniform and predetermined "assent." Churchgoers must both all be the same, and *always* be the same.

"What shape thou wilt"

By contrast, the type of theater that Faustus stages – both for his onstage, fictional spectators and for the paying customers in the auditorium – appeals to variety and changeability, thriving by catering to a diversity of desires. Above all, Faustus's theater depends on mutual gratification. At the imperial court, for example, Faustus announces that "delight[ing]" the Emperor "with some mirth" is "all I desire" (A.4.1.83-85). Later in the play, when the Duke of Vanholt assures Faustus that his latest magical performance "hath much pleased me," Faustus is heartily gratified: "I am glad it contents you so well." The Duchess, too, "see[s]" and commends Faustus's "courteous intent to pleasure" her. (A.4.2.1-8). The "pleasure" that Faustus provides his audiences with (and the pleasure he in turn derives from pleasuring them) is often explicitly *visual* pleasure. Consider the expanded B-text version of the scene with the Vanholts:

> DUKE Thanks, Master Doctor, for these pleasant sights. Now know I how sufficiently to recompense your great deserts in erecting that enchanted castle in the air, the sight whereof so delighted me as nothing in the world could please me more.
>
> FAUSTUS I do think myself, my good lord, highly recompensed in that it pleaseth your grace to think but well of that which Faustus hath performed. (B.4.6.1-8)

Faustus's tendency to speak of himself in the third person ("that which Faustus hath performed") has been read pathologically, as evidence of his suffering from a high level of personal dissociation.[130] Yet it also reveals his possession of a spectacularized sense of self, a heightened sense of self-consciousness as both subject and object of his own internal gaze.

When Faustus visits the imperial court, the Emperor confesses an intense and homoeroticized visual longing for Alexander the Great. Strikingly, the Emperor's desire to see Alexander is coupled with a desire to be seen himself:

> Then, Doctor Faustus, mark what I shall say.
> As I was sometime solitary set
> Within my closet, sundry thoughts arose
> About the honour of mine ancestors –

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[129] Ibid.

[130] Juan Prieto-Pablos notes that Faustus uses second and third person forms of self-reference "as frequently as the first-person form" – far more than any other character from the period's surviving plays. Prieto-Pablos suggests that an "explanation may lie in the different and varying degrees of attachment of the character to his own self – what I have defined as processes of personal association or dissociation." Juan Prieto-Pablos, "'What art thou Faustus?' Self-reference and strategies of identification in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*," *English Studies*, 74.1 (1993), 66, 83.

…
Amongst which kings is Alexander the Great,
Chief spectacle of the world's pre-eminence,
The bright shining of whose glorious acts
Lightens the world with his reflecting beams –
As when I hear but motion made of him,
It grieves my soul I never saw the man. (A.4.1.16-31)

The Emperor positions himself as both the object of attention ("mark what I shall say") and the subject of a desiring gaze for the "spectacle" of Alexander. Such a fusion of the roles of actor and spectator characterizes Faustus's own theatrical endeavours over the course of the play. The "performative quality" that Fletcher highlights in Faustus's opening speech is typical of his many acts of role-playing. Not all of Faustus's performances are equally convincing; for example, it is hard to believe that Faustus ever has any intention of "offer[ing] lukewarm blood of new-born babes" to the "altar" of Beelzebub (A.2.1.13-14). Such speeches are instead self-consciously performative, Faustus aping the role of evil magician in order to please his diabolical audience (Mephistopheles and his crew). Towards the end of the play, as his final hour looms, Faustus remains the consummate actor, addressing a trio of scholars with his characteristic combination of hyperbole and attention to audience response: "Faustus' offence can ne'er be pardoned. The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus. Ah, gentlemen, hear me with patience, and tremble not at my speeches." Of course, Faustus's "speeches" here are intended precisely to make his audience "tremble," a somatic response Faustus immediately models for his spectators: "my heart pants and quivers" (A.5.2.14-17).

As much as Faustus seeks to be the object of others' attentions, he is also figured as the desiring subject of visual pleasure. Much of Faustus's time with Mephistopheles is spent *sightseeing*, visiting the great cities of renaissance Europe and "with pleasure [taking] the view / Of rarest things and royal courts of kings" (A.4.Chorus.1-2). Arriving at the Vatican, Faustus recalls the "buildings" of Naples, "fair and gorgeous to the eye" (A.3.1.10), and now "long[s] to see the monuments / And situation of bright splendent Rome (A.3.1.47-48). Mephistopheles, however, suggests that Faustus might rather fuse the roles of spectator and actor: "I know you'd fain *see* the pope / and *take some part* of holy Peter's feast" (A.3.1.49-50; my emphases). In the longer B-text version of the scene, Faustus responds to Mephistopheles with an account of visual pleasure in which looking provokes the concomitant desire to be looked at:

So high our dragons soared into the air
That, looking down, the earth appeared to me
No bigger than my hand in quantity.
There did we view the kingdoms of the world,
And what might please mine eye I there beheld.
Then in this show let me an actor be,
That this proud pope may Faustus' cunning see. (B.3.1.70-76)

For Faustus, the pleasure derived from spectatorship is ultimately inseparable from the urge to join in and become part of the spectacle: "in this show let me an actor be."

The interactive nature of Faustus's theatrical project, its blurring of the distinction between spectacle and spectator, is most thoroughly staged in the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, a scene which also invites recognition of the crucial differences between church and theater in terms of attention and performance. When Faustus, in a moment of repentance, performs another (unanswered) prayer, Lucifer appears with his crew and warns the doctor that he "shouldst not think of God. Think of the devil" (A.2.3.91). With

Faustus vowing to divert his attentions and "never to look to heaven," Lucifer chooses to "highly gratify" him by means of theatrical spectacle: "we are come from hell to show thee some pastime. Sit down, and thou shalt see all the Seven Deadly Sins appear in their special shapes" (A.2.3.98-101). However, when Lucifer finally instructs Faustus to pay attention and "mark this show," he also directs Faustus to attract attention to himself by participating in the performance: "Now, Faustus, examine them of their several names and dispositions" (A.2.3.104-106). Ostensibly the spectator of the pageant, as it unfolds Faustus becomes part of the spectacle as he engages with its various actors, from arguing with Envy over a chair to sit in (A.2.3.131-133) to rejecting Gluttony's request for a dinner date (A.2.3.142-146) and flirting with "Mistress Minx" herself, Lechery (A.2.3.151-154).

After the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, Lucifer asks Faustus how he has enjoyed the show:

FAUSTUS O, this feeds my soul!
LUCIFER Tut, Faustus, in hell is all manner of delight.
FAUSTUS O, might I see hell and return again, how happy were I then!
LUCIFER Thou shalt. I will send for thee at midnight. [*Presenting a book*] In meantime, take this book. Peruse it thoroughly, and thou shalt turn thyself into what shape thou wilt. (A.2.3.157-163)

In the final section of this chapter I will examine how, by giving spectators the chance to "see hell and return again," *Faustus* both imagines the theater as, and temporarily transforms it into, hell itself. Here it is important to note that the book Lucifer gives Faustus-the-spectator also bestows upon him the magical power of the actor: "thou shalt turn thyself into what shape thou wilt." Unlike churchgoers, all the same and always the same, theatergoers are all different and ever-changing.

"Ah, Mephistopheles!"

The queer potential of this understanding of theater – as that which is mutable, diverse, and various – is manifested in the relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles and their simultaneously histrionic and homoerotic bonding. After agreeing to "let" Faustus be "an actor" in the pope's "show," Mephistopheles emphasizes the collaborative basis of their theatrical project:

And then *devise* what best contents thy mind,
By cunning in thine art, to cross the pope
Or dash the pride of this solemnity –
…
Or any villainy thou canst *devise*,
And I'll *perform* it, Faustus. Hark, they come.
This day shall make thee be admired in Rome. (B.3.1.79-88; my emphases)

For Elizabethans, the act of 'devising' had specifically theatrical connotations. [131] When the homilist reminds parishioners that "'for the malice of the inventions and devices of the people'" God "will 'cast them out' of his house,"[132] he is ultimately suggesting that God casts *theater* out of his house – and out of heaven.

Faustus and Mephistopheles, however, revel in the mutual gratification that their joint "'inventions and devices'" permit:

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[131] The *OED* offers a definition of "device," common in the sixteenth century, as "Something devised or fancifully invented for dramatic representation." "device, n," *OED Online*, March 2023, Oxford University Press, www.oed.com/view/Entry/51464 (accessed 8 May 2023).
[132] *The Books of Homilies*, 213. The homilist quotes Hosea 9:15.

Enter Faustus and Mephistopheles, [dressed] like the cardinals

MEPHISTOPHELES [*aside to Faustus*]

Now tell me, Faustus, are we not fitted well?

FAUSTUS [*aside to Mephistopheles*]

Yes, Mephistopheles, and two such cardinals
Ne'er served a holy pope as we shall do. (B.3.1.160-163)

Over the course of the play there is a clear implication that Faustus and Mephistopheles enjoy each other theatrically and erotically; indeed, the inextricability of theatrical and erotic impulses is perhaps signalled by Lechery's prominent positioning (coming last) in the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins. From the start, Faustus rhapsodizes the intensity of his attachment to his familiar in the language of Petrarchan love poetry: "Had I as many souls as there be stars, / I'd give them all for Mephistopheles" (A.1.3.103-104). Although Faustus formally sells his soul to Lucifer, he insists to Mephistopheles that he "hath hazarded that *for thee*" (A.2.1.33; my emphasis). During the soul-selling ceremony itself Faustus reiterates that Mephistopheles is both his target audience and the object of his desire:

Lo, Mephistopheles, for love of thee
I cut mine arm, and with my proper blood
Assure my soul to be great Lucifer's[.]
…
View here the blood that trickles from mine arm,
And let it be propitious for my wish. (A.2.1.53-58)

Performed as a highly personalized agreement between Faustus and Mephistopheles, the ceremony finally becomes a parody wedding:

FAUSTUS Here, Mephistopheles, receive this scroll,
A deed of gift of body and of soul –
But yet conditionally that thou perform
All articles prescribed between us both.

MEPHISTOPHELES Faustus, I swear by hell and Lucifer
To effect all promises between us made. (A.2.1.89-94)

The idea that Faustus and Mephistopheles are thus bonded together in a queer inversion of heterosexual Christian matrimony is underscored when the doctor, claiming to be "wanton and lascivious," asks Mephistopheles for "a wife, the fairest maid in Germany": "Tut, Faustus, marriage is but a ceremonial toy. *If thou lovest me*, think no more of it" (A.2.1.140-150; my emphasis). Instead of providing him with a wife, Mephistopheles promises to satisfy Faustus's *various* longings:

She whom thine eye shall like, thy heart shall have,
Be she as chaste as was Penelope,
As wise as Saba, or as beautiful
As was bright Lucifer before his fall. (A.2.1.153-156)

By offering Lucifer's male beauty as the ultimate erotic spectacle, Mephistopheles suggests the queerness and fluidity of Faustus's – and his own – desires.

As in the case of Marlowe's Edward II and Piers Gaveston, the homoeroticism of the bond between Faustus and Mephistopheles is further signalled by the shared "pleasure" they derive from the performance of poetry and music:[133]

Have I not made blind Homer sing to me

[133] At the beginning of *Edward II* Gaveston announces: "I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits, / Musicians, that with touching of a string / May draw the pliant king which way I please." Marlowe, *Edward II*, ed. Martin Wiggins (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1.50-2.

Of Alexander's love and Oenone's death?
And hath not he that built the walls of Thebes
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp
Made music with my Mephistopheles? (A.2.3.25-30)

The possessive dimension of Faustus's attachment ("my Mephistopheles") is reciprocated elsewhere by Mephistopheles, who repeatedly addresses the doctor as "my Faustus" (A.3.1.29). During the episode at the Vatican, the erotic bent of Mephistopheles's service is implied when Faustus reflects: "Sweet Mephistopheles, thou pleasest me" (B.3.1.57). Given Mephistopheles's talent for pleasing Faustus, the doctor's climactic exclamation when he is finally dragged off to hell at the end of the play – "Ah, Mephistopheles!" (A.5.2.115) – begins to sound more like the cry of orgasm than the scream of terror. Indeed, this would be a logical conclusion of the pleasure that Faustus takes – first announced in relation to Aristotle – in being "ravished." After Aristotle, Faustus excitedly declares that instead "'Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me" (A.1.1.112), before later submitting to the "ravishing sound of [Orpheus's] melodious harp."

Faustus is not alone in enjoying a good ravishing. At the imperial court, the Emperor tries to embrace the illusion of Alexander, forgetting that it is "not substantial": "O, pardon me. My thoughts are so ravish*è*d / With sight of this renown*è*d emperor / That in mine arms I would have compassed him" (B.4.1.103-106). The intense experience of physical immediacy provided by theatrical display produces a potent erotic charge. Here, looking does the work of touching:[134] the emperor experiences visual pleasure but his erotic craving for Alexander's body is only stimulated, not sated. Faustus, on the other hand, gets lucky with the spirit of Helen. Seeking to "glut the longing of [his] heart's desire," Faustus asks his "Sweet Mephistopheles" to procure for him the "sweet embracings" of "heavenly Helen":

MEPHISTOPHELES Faustus, this, or what else thou shalt desire,
Shall be performed in twinkling of an eye.
Enter Helen [*brought in by Mephistopheles*]
FAUSTUS Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
[*They kiss*]
Her lips suck forth my soul. See where it flies!
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
[*They kiss again*]
Here will I dwell, for heaven be in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.
I will be Paris …
…
And wear thy colours on my plum*è*d crest. (A.5.1.69-100)

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[134] "As so often, looking has replaced touching." Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), 98. Simon Shepherd notes that for early moderners "a sense of touch was a component of theories of vision." Simon Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8. Modern theatre theorists retain a sense of sight's haptic dimension, proposing that "Intense looking can sometimes be elevated to 'touching' the object of desire" (George Rodosthenous, "Introduction," in *Theatre as Voyeurism*, ed. Rodosthenous [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015], 11) and "sight can become tactile through looking and *looking again* at the sensual aesthetic of the work, which activates a sensory involvement akin to touch within this act of looking." Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 78.

In line with his fetish for ravishment, Faustus initially casts himself as the passive recipient of Helen's "suck[ing] forth" of his "soul," queerly overturning the male-female axis of sexual control and submission. Their tryst is further queered by being ontologically sodomitical, a union of human and demon. Again, sex and theater are inseparable, as Faustus's erotic pleasure in embracing Helen is coupled with the impulse to roleplay, to dress up as Paris and re-enact the legendary love affair.

In highlighting the relationship between theatrical performance and queer desires, Marlowe provocatively confirms the sodomophobic fears of Elizabethan antitheatricalists. At one level, the theater's function as a queer space was strictly physical: the playhouse, Philip Stubbes lamented, was a cruising ground for sex where men seeking sex with men might find like-minded "mates" in the crowd with whom to go "homeward of their way very friendly" and "play the Sodomites."[135] Beyond the sexual act itself, however, theater's intrinsic queerness was also considered in phenomenological terms. William Prynne describes the "lascivious whorish Actions" of players "as so many fiery darts of Satan to wound our soul with lust; as so many conduit-pipes … to usher concupiscence into our hearts, thorow the doores, the portals of our eyes and ears."[136] As Katherine Eisaman Maus explains,

> If the relationship of spectator to spectacle seems analogous to the erotic relationship of man to woman, Prynne's language suggests a number of paradoxes. The spectacle is conceived as "whorish" female, but it manifests its power by ravishing the spectators with phallic darts of Satan. Though the audience is imagined as male, its role in the sexualized transaction is a passive one: it takes the spectacle in through the sensory orifices[.][137]

The "paradoxes" that Maus refers to are implicitly queer: spectators derive pleasure from a theatrical experience that blur distinctions between active and passive, male and female. Spectators, acted on and penetrated by stage spectacle, experience powerlessness and vulnerability, and yet simultaneously wield power and agency, as what they see "precipitat[es] them on" to *act* on "lust."[138] Ultimately, theater's queer threat was ontological. Alisa Solomon argues that

> One consequence of "playing the *Sodomits*" and erasing borders of sexual categories was losing *all* sense of boundary and propriety, all sense of self. […] Theatre threatened this too, through the shameless display of the actor's skills at changing, apparently, his very nature. His abilities called into question the notion that anyone actually has a nature […] an anxiety born in an age of new social mobility, spurred by an emerging market economy. Theatre, by *its* nature, reveals and revels in the very angst the antitheatricalists were frantically trying to quell: the notion of identities as contingent and malleable and the suggestion that categories can be playfully transgressed – *queered*.[139]

Part of the immense appeal of *Faustus* in particular, and early modern theatergoing more broadly, lay in this queerly unstable positioning of the individual spectator as both doer and done-to, subject and object of attention and desire.

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[135] Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, 90v-91r.
[136] Prynne, 375.
[137] Maus, "Horns of Dilemma," 568.
[138] Prynne, 931; my emphasis.
[139] Solomon, "Great Sparkles of Lust," 12-13.

Signs of (dis)grace

The queer pleasures potentially derived from attending performances of *Faustus* were, however, precarious; there was a price to pay for joining in. While critics routinely highlight how "Marlowe thrills his audience with the specter of damnation,"[140] I suggest that *Faustus* not only staged damnation but also allowed early modern spectators to *experience* damnation alongside the doomed doctor, providing the audience with an experience of immersive participation that was as risky as it was rewarding. Close examination of the play reveals that Faustus himself is always-already-damned, suffering from the clearest indication of an individual's reprobate status: sensory confusion. As Matthew Milner explains, amongst Calvinists the key difference between the elect and the reprobate "was perceptive": while the saved and the damned inhabited the same phenomenal universe and "experienced the same physical sensations, the reprobate were blind to their promissory content."[141] Elizabethan theologians lamented the plight of the reprobate masses who "heare, and not understand ... see, and not perceive."[142] Excluded absolutely from the divinely-bestowed grace which is required to perceive the truth of God, the reprobate were left with only a "generall and confused" awareness of their maker.[143]

Marlowe depicts the reprobate's experience of sensory confusion primarily through Faustus's interactions over the course of the play with a pair of Angels, one Good, the other Evil. Each of these scenes follows a similar pattern, with Faustus oblivious to much of the dialogue, pouncing on any word or idea he can identify:

GOOD ANGEL Sweet Faustus, think of heaven and heavenly things.
EVIL ANGEL No Faustus, think of honour and wealth.
Exeunt Angels.
FAUSTUS Of wealth?
Why, the seigniory of Emden shall be mine. (A.2.1.20-23)

Here it is as if the only word he has heard in the exchange is "wealth." When the Angels next appear Faustus again has difficulty hearing them: "Who buzzeth in mine ears I am a spirit?" (A.2.3.14). Just before he signs his devilish pact he sees – and then un-sees – a dire warning appear on his body:

But what is this inscription on mine arm?
Homo, fuge! Whither should I fly?
If unto God, he'll throw thee down to hell. –
My senses are deceived; here's nothing writ. –
I see it plain. Here in this place is writ
Homo, fuge! (A.2.1.76-81)

Faustus's sensory confusion ("*My senses are deceived*") – and hence his reprobation – is thus rendered fully explicit.

Both the text of the play and its conditions of performance immerse spectators in the experience of the confused reprobate who might "heare" the dialogue but not "understand" it, "see" the stage but not fully "perceive" the action represented. Ruth Lunney argues that "What the audience sees in the angel scenes as stable and transparent – angelic figures,

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[140] Kearney, 177.
[141] Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 229.
[142] Thomas Becon, *A new postil conteinyng most godly and learned sermons vpon all the Sonday Gospelles* (London, 1566), 167r-168v.
[143] John Deacon and John Walker, *Dialogical discourses of spirits and divels declaring their proper essence, natures, dispositions, and operations, their possessions and dispossessions* (London, 1601), 14.

angelic voices – [Faustus] sees as confusing and arbitrary."[144] But we cannot assume that what the play's spectators heard *or* saw was "stable and transparent." On the contrary, in the "acoustically aggressive"[145] amphitheaters housing performances of *Faustus* it is likely that many lines of dialogue were lost on even the most diligent spectator.[146] The play was equally capable of producing ocular anxieties.[147] When Faustus sees the inscription on his arm did spectators see it too? Probably not. Similarly, when the Old Man attempts to persuade Faustus to abandon magic, he "see[s] an angel hovers o'er [Faustus's] head" (A.5.1.54). The Old Man is clearly intended to be a foil to Faustus in being unambiguously amongst the elect. In all likelihood, however, his vision was available only to his eyes; there is no stage direction in either text indicating that any "angel" appeared. If the elect Old Man saw an angel, but the audience did not, surely some spectators were led to question the security of their own position in the sensory hierarchy. What else, one might worry, am I not seeing or hearing?

By inflaming spectators' anxieties concerning their own sensory confusion, *Faustus* encourages them to engage in the kind of soteriological self-scrutiny – the searching for signs of one's election or reprobation – which contributes to Faustus's psychological disintegration at the end of the play. This epistemology of salvation became a focus of religious energies in the period. In his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton provides a visceral description of the psychic stress endured by a population forever in the throes of soteriological scrutiny, whose attempts to discover their fate "so rent, tear and wound men's consciences, that they are almost mad, and at their wits' end."[148] In provoking anxieties amongst its spectators regarding their own sensory capabilities and corresponding access to grace, the play inflames the individual spectator's impulse to autoscopic scrutiny.

At the same time that *Faustus* provokes the urge to self regard the play also highlights – and creates the conditions for – the practice of searching for signs of election or reprobation in others. During one of the play's comic scenes, a knight sceptical of Faustus's powers responds sarcastically to the doctor's admission that he can only raise spirits and not bodies: "now there's a *sign of grace* in you, when you will confess the truth" (A.4.1.51-52; my emphasis).[149] Paul Stegner notes that although Calvinists continually emphasized the inscrutability of God's will this did not prevent the laity endlessly debating about who among them was saved and who was damned.[150] Spectators with a proclivity for searching for signs of election or reprobation in others could have had a field-day in the theater. Such spaces cultivated what Lars Engle terms "a community of mutual regard"[151]

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[144] Ruth Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition: Innovation in the English Drama before 1595* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 149.

[145] Stanev, 47. Stanev provides a comprehensive catalogue of potential sources of sensory confusion and distraction in theatres (44-54).

[146] In a 2018 production of *Faustus* director Paulette Randall had the Angels speak many of their lines simultaneously, thus compounding the difficulty (for both Faustus and spectators) of hearing their advice. Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, Paulette Randall (director), *Shakespeare's Globe*, 1 December 2018, Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, London.

[147] Erika Lin argues that *Faustus* foregrounds "uncertainty about the act of seeing," but does not link such "uncertainty" to reprobate experience. Erika Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 124.

[148] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1638), 698.

[149] The knight's statement has no equivalent in the B-text, suggesting that where the play's investment in soteriological scrutiny is emphasized here in the A-text, in the B-text this emphasis is provided by the device of the devils scrutinizing Faustus in tandem with the audience.

[150] Paul Stegner, "'Try what repentance can': *Hamlet*, Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority," *Shakespeare Studies* 35 (2007), 110.

[151] Engle, "'I am that I am,'" 191.

where, as Kent Cartwright explains, playgoers are "physically present to each other" and "recognize their own and others' reactions."[152] Early modern theaters were potential hotbeds of thievery, prostitution, and violence bringing in a range of characters whose lewd and lascivious behaviour might have marked them as damned in the eyes of their fellow spectators. If an absent Calvinist God had already failed to give grace to these sinful playgoers, they could at least disgrace each other.

"This is hell, nor am I out of it"

When Faustus first performs magic in the A-text, he is alone onstage. In the B-text, however, his entrance is preceded by the ominous sound of '*Thunder*. *Enter* LUCIFER *and four* DEVILS [*above*]' (B.1.3.0 sd). From the moment of his first conjuration, then, watched over by the devils, Faustus's transgressions are a spectacle for the damned – in this play watching itself is a diabolical pastime. This impression is heightened at the beginning of the scene of Faustus's ultimate demise. Lucifer enters with the other devils and announces that they have come "To view the subjects of our monarchy" – the plural rendering explicit the metatheatrical alignment of reprobate Faustus and his reprobate spectators. Beelzebub chimes in, relishing his opportunity "to mark him how he doth demean himself." Finally Mephistopheles, anticipating Faustus's arrival onstage with Wagner, charges the others to "See where they come" (B.5.2.2-19). As Erika Lin suggests, such metatheatrical inclusionary gestures create a sense of "complicity" between "on- and offstage spectators."[153] In the final act of the B-text Faustus is positioned as a spectacle of suffering for both the devils *and* the spectators in the auditorium. Simon Shepherd similarly argues that "the audience's privileged seeing is complicated because they watch with the devils" and "are situated in parallel with them":[154] Faustus is a spectacle of suffering for devils and spectators alike. No longer simply experiencing the sensory confusion of the living reprobate, the play's spectator-devils now find themselves sitting amongst the damned in a theater of hell.

Hence Mephistopheles's famous assertion – "this is hell, nor am I out of it" (A.1.3.78) – encompasses both the notion of hell as internal psychological condition[155] *and* the theater's function as a material diabolical space. The association between hell and the theaters was common amongst Elizabethan antitheatricalists who believed that simply "sitting among a group of degenerate sinners" at a play could "jeopardize salvation."[156] Anthony Munday lambasted those who by frequenting the playhouses "have turned … their soules to the state of everlasting damnation." Munday further insisted upon the *collaborative* dimension of the theater's diabolism: "Onlie the filthines of plaies, and spectacles is such, as maketh both the actors and beholders giltie alike … For while they saie nought, but gladlie looke on, they al by sight and assent be actors."[157] Certainly in the

[152] Cartwright, *Shakespearean Tragedy,* 25.
[153] Lin, 123.
[154] Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Press, 1986), 138.
[155] Mephistopheles repeatedly characterizes hell as a state of mind. In one of his accounts "Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed / In one self place, for where we are is hell, / And where hell is must we ever be" (A.2.1.124-6). Jonathan Dollimore suggests that although Mephistopheles's conception of hell "as a state of being and consciousness can be seen as a powerful recuperation of hell at a time when its material existence as a *place* was being questioned, it is also an arrogant appropriation of hell, an incorporating of it into the consciousness of the subject." Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984), 115.
[156] Targoff, 54.
[157] Munday, 93, 3.

case of *Faustus* the play's paying spectators, as much as its paid actors, "gladlie" engage in the diabolical act of looking which culminates in Faustus's eternal damnation.

Faustus's "sensory dramaturgy"[158] finally transports the play's spectators to the very bowels of hell. Jonathan Harris notes that *Macbeth* contains several stage directions calling for the use of gunpowder, the sulphurous odour of which "was a stinking sign of diabolical activity" in medieval and early modern England.[159] Furthermore, as Harris points out, the Reformation had resulted in the banning of incense and the beginning of "a new olfactory universe in which sweet smells no longer suggested the presence of the divine":[160]

> after the Reformation, all that remained for the nose in religious representation was the foulness of the diabolical. Thus the stench of the play's squibs might have prompted association with the scent of Catholic churches not because they smelled alike but because they had, in a prior olfactory episteme, presumed each other.[161]

Faustus relies heavily on the use of gunpowder: the devils rarely appear without a corresponding burst of fireworks. By the end of the performance, then, the audience would have been almost suffocated by the smell of sulphur (not to mention the stench of sweat, booze, and the full gamut of bodily fluids which permeated theatres).[162] Thus while Michael Keefer argues that the B-text's augmentation of the play's spectacular elements allows spectators to watch more "securely" and "safely" than the psychologically-introspective A-text,[163] I argue that both versions possess the potential to trigger spiritual angst in their audiences. When the Old Man in the A-text condemns the "stench" of Faustus's soul, spectators surrounded by the stench emanating from audience and stage alike were pushed to worry about their own soteriological fates. Participating in Faustus's damnation via their devilish looking, spectators also got a taste of damnation themselves, enveloped by the smell of hell in a theatre (and a world) abandoned by the consoling scent of God.

Unlike Faustus, the play's original spectators got to leave hell again at the end of the performance – unless, that is, they were like Mephistopheles, carrying their own private hell around with them wherever they went. Certainly, spectators took *something* with them after the show was over. We will never know what 'actually happened' – "the thing as it was" – at Exeter. Perhaps it was an outbreak of mass hysteria; perhaps an overzealous spectator rushed the stage and pretended to be a devil; perhaps devils are real (they were for many people in the sixteenth century). What we do know is that in eradicating the line between stage and auditorium, spectacle and spectator, illusion and reality – and ultimately the boundary between the theater and the outside world – such episodes reveal the extent to which *Faustus* in particular, and early modern theater more broadly, invited playgoers to join in with the drama and become part of the action. Faustus turns to theater because it allows for a kind of mutual gratification – the giving and receiving of attention and response – that he finds lacking in the church. Early moderners followed Faustus to the theater in droves. That they did so in spite of the perilous risk to their souls – a risk that Marlowe's play foregrounds both in content and in form – underscores the intensity of theater's sociopsychological appeal. Beyond getting to join in with the show, theatergoers were also afforded the opportunity, like Faustus and Mephistopheles, to explore queer desires and establish queer bonds. Of course, such bonds could be precarious and volatile:

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[158] Stanev, 1.
[159] Harris, 475.
[160] Ibid, 483.
[161] Ibid, 484.
[162] On the variety of "unprepossessing odors" assaulting early modern theatregoers see Stanev, 49-50.
[163] Michael Keefer, "Verbal Magic and the Problem of the A and B Texts of *Doctor Faustus*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 82.3 (1983), 335.

Mephistopheles ends up dragging 'his' Faustus off to hell at the end of the play, and any sense of harmony in the theatrical community at Exeter seems to have swiftly evaporated at the sight of the extra devil, as "every man hastened to be *first* out of dores" to safety. Yet even as these terrified actors and spectators fled the theater, they took the theatrical experience "out of dores" with them, continuing their own individual performances, perhaps even transformed by the event like the players who, "contrarye to their custome," abstained from their usual debaucheries that night in favour of "reading" and "prayer."[164] Even if the players had gone off script, finding themselves able "to go no further with this matter," the show went on.

[164] As Jeremy Lopez notes, "if both the Puritans and their adversaries were willing to argue publicly that a play could affect reality and the lives of its audience, it seems more than safe to assume that this is the kind of assumption playgoers would have brought with them to the playhouse." Lopez, *Theatrical Convention*, 32.

2. Ben Jonson's "open stage"

> And by thy wiser temper, let men know
> Thou art not covetous of least self-fame,
> Made from the hazard of another's shame:
> Much less with lewd, profane, and beastly phrase,
> To catch the world's loose laughter or vain gaze.
>
> Ben Jonson, *Epigrams* II ("To My Book")[165]

> NASUTUS I pray you, let's go see him, how he looks
> After these libels.
>
> Ben Jonson, *"*Apologetical Dialogue"[166]

Critics have long puzzled over the glaring contradiction at the heart of Ben Jonson's career: a man of the theater who worked as an actor and playwright for four decades, he is nevertheless routinely read as an "antitheatrical"[167] writer. Even in *Poetaster* – a play that doubles as a theatrical manifesto – Jonson attacks his audiences, actors, and fellow playwrights in turn while foregrounding the shameful self-exposure involved in his own being "known unto the open stage" (1.2.60). In stigmatizing the 'openness' of playmaking Jonson echoes contemporary antitheatricalists who lament, variously, the "open theater"; "open theaters"; the "open shameless behaviour" of theatregoers; the "open corruption" on display at the playhouse; and so on.[168] Yet despite his apparent denigration of "the open stage" Jonson consistently and insistently rendered himself open to view, as in the prologue to the play directly preceding *Poetaster*, *Cynthia's Revels*:

> If gratious silence, sweete Attention,
> Quick sight, and quicker apprehension,
> (The light of judgments throne) shine any where;
> Our doubtful author hopes, this is their Sphaere
> And therefore *opens he himselfe* to those,
> To other weaker Beames, his labors close;
> As loathe to prostitute their virgin straine,
> To every vulgar, and adulterate braine.[169]

Jonson professes a desire to evade the gazes ("weaker Beames") of "vulgar" spectators yet at the same time compulsively stages himself before the eye-"Beames" of the entire audience, either in his own person or via fictional avatars like Criticus in *Cynthia's Revels* and Horace in *Poetaster*. What makes the early modern theatre "open"? Why was this openness so threatening, and yet so appealing? And why does Jonson "*open … himself*" time and time again to the playgoing public?

In the previous chapter I argued that the experience of immersive participation shared by actors and spectators alike during the performance of a play underpinned the phenomenal popularity of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* in particular, as well as early modern theatergoing more broadly. The absence of any demarcation between stage and auditorium,

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[165] Jonson, "To My Book," in *The Complete Poems*, lines 9-12.
[166] Jonson, "Apologetical Dialogue," lines 16-17.
[167] Joseph Lowenstein, "The Script in the Marketplace," in *Representing the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 272.
[168] Northbrooke, 61; Gosson, *School of Abuse*, F2r; Munday, 89; Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, G6v.
[169] Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels, or, The Fountain of Self-Love*, ed. Alexander Judson (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912), Prologue.1-8.

fantasy and reality, was a source of pleasurable interaction for theatergoers – but it could also trigger considerable anxiety. In this chapter I explore what happened to the author (both philosophically and physically) in the theater. Set in the Rome of Augustus Caesar and populated by such literary luminaries as Horace, Virgil, and Ovid, *Poetaster* transfers the early modern Poets' War into a classical setting and focuses primarily on Horace's – in other words Jonson's – attempts to assert his poetic and theatrical authority over the poetasters Crispinus (standing in for John Marston) and Demetrius (standing in for Thomas Dekker). *Poetaster* reveals that, much like the actor-spectators who attended performances of *Faustus*, Jonson derived pleasure from seeing, and being seen, at the theater. At the same time, joining in with the action was risky business. Where Marlowe's play foregrounds (and simulates) the spiritual dangers posed by playmaking, Jonson's *Poetaster* imagines that the theater sodomitically opened playwrights, exposing them to public view. Yet *Poetaster* reveals that Jonson did not simply grudgingly submit to the inevitable immersion of the author in the theater, or to his own participation in the bodily exchanges that constituted live theatrical performance, but rather revelled in this immersion and participation. Like Marlovian drama, Jonsonian drama engaged the full sensorium; Jonson's stage might not have smelled like hell, but as the Scrivener complains in the prologue to *Bartholomew Fair*, his theater was "as dirty as Smithfield, and as stinking every whit."[170]

I begin by uncovering the centrality of visuality and visibility to Jonson's understanding of his own theatrical project and authorial identity. We have inherited a critical tradition that has generally taken Jonson's most virulent denigrations of the physical ("So short lived are the bodies of all things in comparison of their souls"[171]) at their word and concluded that his "attitude towards the visible dimension of theater was often highly disapproving."[172] Certainly Jonson himself laid extensive groundwork for such conclusions, frequently professing a disdain for the visual dimensions of his art that culminated near the end of his career in *The Staple of News* where the prologue all but wishes the audience blind:

> Would you were come to heare, not see a play.
> Though we his actors, must provide for those
> Who are our guests here, in the way of showes,
> The maker hath not so; he'ld haue you wise
> Much rather by your eares, then by your eyes.[173]

Yet for all Jonson's apparent pitting of sight against sound, looks against lines, close attention to his body of writing reveals their profound inextricability: "Language most shewes a man: speake, that I may see thee."[174] This oft-cited apothegm from Jonson's *Discoveries* might seem to hierarchize word over image, but it also conflates them. As Jonson reveals in *Poetaster*, in the theater any such hierarchy is utterly undone.

Like much of Jonson's writing (and certainly much Jonson criticism), *Poetaster* appears to position the study and the stage as antithetical loci of artistic production and privilege private self-seclusion over public self-display. However, as Jeffrey Knapp argues, upon closer examination Jonson thoroughly deconstructs the study/stage binary, enacting

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[170] Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair,* The Yale Ben Jonson, ed. Eugene Waith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), Induction.154.
[171] Jonson, *Hymenaei,* in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques,* The Yale Ben Jonson, ed. Stephen Orgel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), lines 5-6.
[172] Julian Koslow, "Humanist Schooling and Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*," *ELH* 73.1 (2006), 133.
[173] Jonson, *The Staple of News,* ed. De Winter (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1905), Prologue.2-6.
[174] Jonson, *Discoveries,* lines 2088-89, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C.H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925-52), 8:592.

instead a "*dramatization*" of writing and exploring a "conceptualization of authorship in specifically dramatic terms."[175] In *Poetaster* even the composition of epic poetry – that most bookish of all genres – is figured in terms of theatrical performance, with both Virgil and his book offered as objects of visual pleasure for the many gazes of a mass audience. By bringing "the author's study *into* the theater," Knapp argues, "Jonson attempted to give authorship dramatic life and in the process submit the dramatist, more fully than earlier plays had, to the theatrical experience."[176] Yet while Knapp usefully highlights the element of "self-exposure" involved in Jonson's staging of the author,[177] he does not extend this insight to consider the homoerotic and sodomitical implications of the author's exposing himself to public view. As Ovid Senior laments upon learning that his son is writing a play in *Poetaster*, in the theater the author might be seen as – and might even become – "an ingle for players" (1.2.14).

In her authoritative account of Jonson's adherence to the classical ideal of stylistic manliness, Lorna Hutson argues that Jonson constructs "a 'metaphorics of the male body'" that valorizes "spaces of inaccessibility" and "nonpenetrability."[178] Ultimately, masculinity is indexed by impenetrability – hence the "struggle" to "police the body's boundaries"[179] that critics routinely identify as a recurring feature of Jonsonian drama. However, while Hutson's metaphorics of "inaccessibility" and "nonpenetrability" might well apply to Jonson's idealized vision of the secluded poet, in actuality Jonson's career as an author in the theater necessarily rendered him accessible and penetrable. The contradictory quality that characterizes Jonson's relationship to the theater is rooted in his recognition that the author is *transformed* by being in the theater. We must not mistake contradiction and conflict for ambivalence, however, or conclude (as many do) that Jonson masochistically worked in a profession that he detested for decades. As *Poetaster* reveals, the openness of playmaking was a source of pleasure as well as anxiety for Jonson – who, after all, chooses to stage himself in this play (via his avatar Horace) as "the most open fellow living" (4.3.111).

Far from occluding the sodomitical vulnerability of the open male author, *Poetaster* foregrounds such potentially queer conceptualizations of playmaking. Along with contemporary antitheatrical writers, Jonson possesses a queerly confused understanding of bodily integrity – and its undoing – in the theatre. The two sensory organs most central to the theatrical experience – eyes and ears – are consistently conceived of as both active and passive, penetrator and penetrated. While *Poetaster* idealizes the penetrative power dramatists exert over audiences, the play also ultimately suggests that to participate in playmaking and open oneself to public view – as actor, spectator, *or* playwright – is to risk, even invites, being penetrated, sodomized, by the eyes and ears of the many. Despite (or indeed because of) the "distinctly homophobic"[180] sentiments identifiable in his plays, Jonson conceives of theatre itself as a queer space where stable penetrative hierarchies (top/bottom; male/female) are anarchically undone. As James Bromley argues, even if Jonson shares in "the broader homophobic tendency in early modern culture" and approaches non-normative "practices satirically or critically, they are still available to

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[175] Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare Only* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 67.
[176] Ibid, 69-70.
[177] Ibid, 68.
[178] Lorna Hutson, "Civility and Virility in Ben Jonson," *Representations* 78.1 (2002), 3.
[179] Allison Deutermann, "'Caviare to the general?' Taste, Hearing, and Genre in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62.2 (2011), 252.
[180] Hutson, "Civility and Virility," 3.

audiences and readers who follow the countercurrents of the text to find the pleasures that the satire seeks to foreclose."[181]

Even more, I argue that Jonson's refusal to "foreclose" the queerness of theatre in *Poetaster* invites fuller recognition of how queerly Jonson conceived of the "pleasures" he derived from the positions he occupied in theatrical and literary networks. Traditionally, relations (real or imagined) between writers in the early modern period have been figured in familial terms: Harold Bloom's filial anxiety for precursors,[182] James Shapiro's fraternal rivalry for contemporaries.[183] Jonson has often been credited as a key figure in the emergence of a "patrilineal and patriarchal authorial framework" at the centre of the "patrilineal world of individual authorship that he helped to produce."[184] However, a strictly "patrilineal" model of literary genealogy is too orderly and stable to account for relations between writers in *Poetaster*, relations that blur penetrative as well as temporal hierarchies and distinctions. Jonson offers an alternative model based on a mutually-penetrative homoerotics of artistic genealogy and community. In *Poetaster*, a writer's relationship to "posterity"[185] (his followers) depends upon the ambiguous versatile positioning of his posterior. In Bloom's theory, precursor poets are phallic phantoms, penetrating the writing of their weaker successors. Literary followers are in the passive position. Jonson's play stages this scenario *while at the same time* reversing roles by casting the precursor Horace as the pathic passive, penetrated by the imitations of the follower Crispinus.

In *Poetaster* what comes behind blurs temporal as well as penetrative distinctions, for looking backward paradoxically engages both the past (precursor poets) and the present/future (following poets). Looking backward is also central to the practice of cruising. In *The Pleasure of the Text* Roland Barthes famously homoeroticizes literary encounters. As a writer, Barthes says, "I must seek out this reader (must 'cruise' him) *without knowing where he is*. A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader's 'person' that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire."[186] Following Barthes, in expanding upon "this coming together of textual and sexual pleasures" Stephen Guy-Bray, Vin Nardizzi, and Will Stockton liken "the backward gaze of scholarship to the backward gaze of cruising" to underscore the erotic dimension of relationships between readers and writers past and present.[187] Applying these insights to *Poetaster*, I argue that practices of cruising – mutual visual appraisals that queer distinctions between subject and object, domination and submission, public and private – might offer a useful framework for rethinking Jonson's own encounters (textual *and* physical) with readers, writers, and especially audiences. For if, as I argue, Jonson takes pleasure in cruising the pages and stages of his textual world, the theatre was as irresistible as it was dangerous. Not only a "site" where men cruised men for sex (the dreaded actualization of Jonson's homoerotics of literary genealogy), the playhouse might also be a Barthesian "site of bliss": a space where

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[181] Bromley, 29; 46.
[182] See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).
[183] See James Shapiro, *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
[184] Gregory Chaplin, "'Divided Amongst Themselves': Collaboration and Anxiety in Jonson's *Volpone*," *ELH* 69.1 (2002), 68.
[185] Jonson, "Apologetical Dialogue," line 7.
[186] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 4.
[187] Stephen Guy-Bray, Vin Nardizzi and Will Stockton, "Introduction," in *Queer Renaissance Historiography: Backward Gaze*, ed Stephen Guy-Bray, Vin Nardizzi, and Will Stockton (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 4.

interpenetrative encounters between bodies and texts realized "the possibility of" (an albeit fraught and anxious) "dialectics of desire."

Body of poetry

Looks mattered to Ben Jonson. Despite his professed indifference to his public's "vain gaze" Jonson was very much concerned with how he appeared to the eyes of "the world." Today we would have no idea what Marlowe or Shakespeare might have looked like, were it not for the survival of a couple of contemporary (or near-contemporary) portraits. Even these, it seems, irked Jonson, who in "On the Portrait of Shakespeare" implores readers of the First Folio: "look / Not on his picture, but his book."[188] First-hand descriptions of Jonson's "picture," on the other hand, abound, both in his own writings and those of his peers. Although critics generally remember Jonson as "obese"[189] (or, in his own words, "fat and old, / Laden with Bellie"[190]) earlier in his career Jonson was notoriously thin, a "leane" and "hollow-cheekt Scrag"[191] with a face "full of pockey-holes and pimples."[192] Between the "mountain belly"[193] and the "hungrie-face,"[194] however, there is a void: Jonson's body is consistently an abject body, characterized by extremes. Although *Poetaster* begins with the claim that Jonson "loathe[s]" both "full-blown vanity" (obesity?) and "base dejection" (starvation?), pursuing instead, "with a constant firmness," "a mean 'twixt both,"[195] the "preeminent Jacobean poet of moderation"[196] conspicuously failed to become the "well-digested man" offered as the play's platonic ideal of the poet (5.3.330).

Conspicuously abject, during his lifetime Jonson's body was also conspicuously on display. Accused by the satirist John Weever of being a famewhore,[197] Jonson began his theatrical career as, in Dekker's words, "a poore Jorneyman Player," best known for taking "mad Ieronimoes part" in early revivals of Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*.[198] According to Dekker, after giving up acting for playwriting Jonson continued to "venter on the stage" after his plays had been performed in order "to exchange curtezies, and complements with Gallants in the Lordes roomes, to make all the house rise up in Armes, and to cry that's *Horace*, that's he, that's he, that's he, that pennes and purges Humours and diseases."[199] During performances, Dekker claimed, Jonson was wont to "sit in a Gallery, when your Comedies and Enterludes have entred their Actions, and there make vile and bad faces at everie line, to make Sentlemen have an eye to you."[200] In Dekker's account Jonson

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[188] Jonson, "On the Portrait of Shakespeare," in *The Complete Poems*, lines 9-10.
[189] Maus, "Satiric and Ideal Economies in the Jonsonian Imagination," *English Literary Renaissance* 19.1 (1989), 59.
[190] Jonson, "To My Lady Covell," in *The Complete Poems*, lines 8-9. See Bruce Boehrer, "Renaissance Overeating: The Sad Case of Ben Jonson," *PMLA* 105.5 (1990), 1071; J.G. Nicholls, *The Poetry of Ben Jonson* (London: Routledge, 1969), 1; and Gabriele Jackson, *Vision and Judgement in Ben Jonson's Drama* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 5.
[191] Thomas Dekker, *Satiro-Mastix, or, The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet*, ed. Hans Scherer (London: David Nutt, 1907), line 2545.
[192] Dekker, *Satiro-Mastix*, line 2571.
[193] Jonson, "My Picture Left in Scotland," in *The Complete Poems*, line 17.
[194] Dekker, *Satiro-Mastix*, lines 646-7.
[195] Jonson, *Poetaster*, Prologue.82-4.
[196] Boehrer, 1072.
[197] John Weever, *The Whipping of the Satyre* (London, 1601), in *Ben Jonson: The Critical Heritage 1599-1798*, ed. D.H. Craig (London: Routledge, 1990), 53.
[198] Dekker, *Satiro-Mastix*, lines 1522-23.
[199] Ibid, lines 2613-16.
[200] Ibid, lines 2607-10.

– a sometime player who got a taste for attention – thoroughly (con)fuses the roles of playwright, spectator, and actor.

From the outset *Poetaster* is framed as a contest over looks between the stage and the audience. Addressing the play's spectators in the Prologue, Livor (Envy) complains that

> The shine
> Of this assembly here offends my sight;
> I'll darken that first, and outface their grace.
> Wonder not if I stare. These fifteen weeks
> (So long as since the plot was but an embryon)
> Have I, with burning lights, mixed vigilant thoughts
> In expectation of this hated play,
> To which, at last, I am arrived as Prologue.
> Nor would I you should look for other looks,
> Gesture, or compliment from me than what
> Th'infected bulk of envy can afford,
> For I am ris here with a covetous hope
> To blast your pleasures and destroy your sports
> With wrestings, comments, applications,
> Spy-like suggestions, privy whisperings,
> And thousand such promoting sleights as these. (Prologue.11-26)

"The shine" that "offends" Livor's "sight" is both literal and figurative. Early performances of *Poetaster* were staged at the candlelit indoor Blackfriars theater; rising from the darkness of hell, Livor is dazzled by the artificial brightness of the playhouse and determines to "darken" the candles. Yet in determining to "out*face* their grace" Livor also confronts the metaphorical "shine" of the assembled spectators, their vibrant visuality, which is located specifically in their visages. The relationship between the stage and the auditorium is framed in terms of mutual facial regard: Livor expects that spectators will "look for" the "looks" he aims at them. Given Livor's professed goal of 'destroying' the play by disruptively 'applying' its action to contentious contemporary London politics, his "looks" are correspondingly combative. Nevertheless, the mood of conflict only intensifies when a second figure appears banishing Livor's "malice" and "spite" from the stage, introducing himself as "An armèd Prologue" (64), and announcing the author's prophylactic attack on those "base detractors and illiterate apes" (70) that he anticipates will "take" his play "with a rugged brow" (87). The play is the site of an interpretive conflict that is played out on the faces (the "rugged brow[s]" or approving smiles) of its spectators. Looks are firmly established as the currency of theater.

Poetaster was also an intervention in a broader conflict waged between Jonson and his rivals Marston and Dekker, "the so-called Poets' War, or War of the Theaters."[201] Critical approaches to the Poets' War remain antithetical. On the one hand the war is

[201] Koslow, 126. Jane Rickard similarly refers to the "so-called war of the theaters." Jane Rickard, "'To Strike the Ear of Time': Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* and the Temporality of Art," *Renaissance Drama* 48.1 (2020), 58. Confusion regarding the name of the conflict derives partly from critical disagreement over where the dispute chiefly lay: was it between rival theater companies (the War of the Theaters) or was it between the playwrights themselves (the Poets' War)? Although neither term was used by contemporaries, given Dekker's branding of the phenomenon as a "Poetomachia," the Poets' War is my preferred term. Regardless, habitual recourse to the "so-called" prefix is symptomatic of a longstanding critical disregard for the substance of the debate.

dismissed entirely – "no more than a contrivance to make money"[202] – and only of interest to antiquarians hunting for biographical information in the thinly-veiled stagings of contemporary theater folk. Recently critics have taken the topic more seriously – James Bednarz, for example, argues that the war was really "a theoretical debate on the social function of drama and the standard of poetic authority that informed comical satire."[203] For Bednarz, addressing the "theoretical" nature of the dispute necessitates undermining the earlier characterization of the war as "a spectacle of self-advertisement calculated to generate publicity."[204] Yet the "spectacle of *self*-advertisement" was inextricable from the ideas of "poetic authority" that were being debated in the plays. Like Bednarz, Richard Helgerson implies an opposition between the matter of a play and the matter of its writer, arguing that the Poets' War involved the consistent "deflection of regard from the product to the producer."[205] Rather than opposing "product" and "producer" I argue that the Poets' War *conflated* the play and the playwright because its participants shared an almost physiognomic belief that a writer's quality (or lack thereof) could be read on his body; the poet's lines were inextricable from his looks.

Patricia Parker describes the "influential Roman tradition that pervades early modern European praise of a stylistic (but also much more than stylistic) *virilitas*" and how classical "passages linking body and style" were "reiterated again and again" by sixteenth-century writers.[206] Parker argues that Jonson viewed "manliness of style" as "inseparable from manliness of body and manner," citing as evidence a passage from the *Discoveries*:

> There cannot be one colour of the mind, an other of the wit. If the mind be staid, grave, and composed, the wit is so; that vitiated, the other is blown, and deflowered. Do we not see, if the mind languish, the members are dull? *Look upon an effeminate person: his very gait confesseth him.* If a man be fiery, his motion is so: if angry, 'tis troubled, and violent. So that we may conclude: wheresoever manners, and fashions are corrupted, language is. It imitates the public riot. The excess of feasts, and apparel, are the notes of a sick state; and the wantonness of language, of a sick mind.[207]

As Parker explains, the contrast here between a manly style and the "gait" of the "effeminate person" is lifted "straight out of Seneca's *Epistle 114*, with its evocation of the effeminate walk of the *cinaedus*" ("the passive or 'pathic' male").[208] When, in an "Apologetical Dialogue" appended to the Folio version of *Poetaster*, Jonson likens his Poets' War antagonists to the figure of the *cinaedus*,[209] we might recall that in the play proper Crispinus (Marston's avatar) is described as "a man borne upon little legs" (2.1.80), and that when Horace (representing Jonson) first encounters him they are both *walking* in the street. Later in the *Discoveries* Jonson expands on the conflation of body and text, poet and poetry:

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[202] David Mann, *The Elizabethan Player: Contemporary Stage Representation* (London: Routledge, 1991), 210. This seems an odd charge; weren't all plays written for the commercial theater contrivances to make money?
[203] James Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets' War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 7.
[204] Ibid, 8.
[205] Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 113.
[206] Patricia Parker, "Virile Style," in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York: Routledge, 1996), 202-5.
[207] Ibid, 207; my emphasis.
[208] Ibid, 205-7.
[209] Jonson, "Apologetical Dialogue," line 69.

> No glass renders a man's form, or likeness, so true as his speech. Nay, it is likened to a man: and as we consider feature, and composition in a man; so words in language: in the greatness, aptness, sound, structure, and harmony of it. Some men are tall, and big, so some language is high and great.[210]

On the page, this passage offers the body as a metaphor for language. When Jonson writes for the stage, however, we can no longer understand the body simply as the vehicle for the tenor of poetry. In the theater – where language is *embodied* – any supposed hierarchy of word over image is undone as text and body are instead conflated. Crispinus's "little legs" are the physical manifestation of his linguistic lowliness; his poor poetry is the linguistic manifestation of his physical deficiency. When Crispinus announces his intention to become a poet, the jeweller's wife Chloë suggests that a physical transformation is required: "And shall your looks change? And your hair change? And all, like these?" (2.2.74-75) The first obstacle to Crispinus's writerly ambitions is that he doesn't *look* like a good poet.

As M.J. Kidnie notes the reference to Crispinus's hair also "continues Jonson's personal attack on his fellow-dramatist, Marston, who had red hair, a hair colour associated with Judas, and hence deceit."[211] Jonson's bodily idiosyncrasies were similarly targeted by his opponents. In Dekker's *Satiromastix* Horace/Jonson is a "thin bearded Hermaphrodite" and a "copper-faced rascal"; repeated references to his "sunburnt" and "tanned skin" were presumably intended as reminders of Jonson's working-class origins.[212] Jonson clearly took note of such slights. In the "Apologetical Dialogue" his plan to achieve laureate status (and in doing so move up the social hierarchy) involves a physiognomic transformation:

> I that spend half my nights and all my days
> Here in a cell, to get a dark, pale face,
> To come forth worth the ivy or the bays,
> And in this age can hope no other grace –
> Leave me. (235-9)

At this stage in his career, young and thin, Jonson suggests that the sign of the poet's greatness is a body drained (of light, of color) by effort. Later, when he was "fat and old," he offers a body stuffed as evidence of his poetic plenitude. Analyzing "My Picture Left in Scotland," Alexander Leggatt suggests that "the delicacy of Jonson's art is somehow depended on the grossness of his body."[213] Thomas Boehrer describes the older Jonson as "a famous fat man and legendary drunkard constructing a cult of personality around his own excessive girth."[214] When, in *Poetaster*, Caesar hails Jonson's alter-ego as "material Horace" (5.2.128), he certainly implies that Horace is "full of matter or sense,"[215] but the emphasis is on the poet *as* (body) matter. Poets' bodies matter.

Virgil, interrupted

In the "Apologetical Dialogue," the "cell" in which Jonson imagines his transfiguration taking place is the author's study. Criticism on Jonson has tended to posit the private study as a creative space in binary opposition to the public theater, a tranquil haven of stability closed off from the noise and unpredictability of the open stage. Jonson's

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[210] Jonson, *Discoveries,* in *Ben Jonson,* ed. Herford, Simpson, and Simpson, 8:435.
[211] Kidnie (ed.), *Poetaster,* 433n.
[212] Dekker, *Satiro-Mastix,* lines 560-4.
[213] Alexander Leggatt, *Ben Jonson: His Vision and His Art* (London: Methuen, 1981), 219.
[214] Boehrer, 1072.
[215] Kidnie (ed.), *Poetaster,* 445n.

1616 publication of his *Workes* is seen as the final blow in the conflict between study and stage. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that Jonson intended "to dissociate the professional writer from the clamour of the marketplace and to install his works in the studies of the gentry and the libraries of the universities" where his "plays were to become fitting companions to the works of Horace and Virgil on the library shelves." In this way Jonson enacted the "separation of the scholar's study and library from the theatrical marketplace."[216] Even though Jonson's plays are given pride of place in the *Workes*, with meticulously detailed recounting of original performance dates, locations, and actors emphasizing their *material* theatrical origins,[217] the publication as a whole is routinely described as essentially "antitheatrical,"[218] aimed at transporting Jonson from the stage to the study once and for all. Yet what Jonson actually does in the *Workes* is stage the study and thoroughly theatricalize writing itself. Where Edward Gieskes argues that in the folio "*Poetaster* becomes a book – a literary artifact – rather than a play,"[219] I contend that the "Apologetical Dialogue" figures the book as a play. Immediately following *Poetaster* in the folio, Jonson addresses "The Reader":

> If, by looking on what is past, thou hast deserved that name, I am willing thou should'st yet know more by that which follows, an apologetical dialogue, which was only once spoken upon the stage, and all the answer I ever gave to sundry impotent libels then cast out (and some yet remaining) against me, and this play. Wherein I take no pleasure to revive the times, but that posterity may make a difference between their manners that provoked me then, and mine that neglected them ever. (2-8)

Even if the dialogue "was only once spoken upon the stage,"[220] it is nevertheless memorialized as a live theatrical event. Julian Koslow tantalisingly conjectures that Jonson (a former professional player) "may have acted the part of himself – 'the Author' – during its only dramatic performance."[221]

The dialogue certainly invites the reader to think of the Author *as an actor*. Assessing the play and its context ("looking on what is past") more fully will involve, in "that which follows," looking directly at the Author. The opening line of the dialogue makes a spectacle of Jonson, with Nasutus imploring his companion Polyposus: "I pray you, let's go see him, how he looks / After these libels" (16-17). When they arrive at his lodging, "*The Author is discovered in his study*" (24sd). The dialogue thus begins precisely as *Poetaster* begins, when Ovid, composing poetry in his study, is interrupted, first by the intrusion of his servant Luscus, followed by no fewer than five further individuals over the course of the first act. If, as Jane Rickard suggests, the play opens with a "primal scene of poetic creation,"[222] the poet himself is an actor on a bustling stage. Joan Carr suggests that

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[216] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 76-77.

[217] James Mardock argues conversely that by presenting his plays "in an author-based chronological order, Jonson suppresses the playhouse as an operating force in textual production." James Mardock, *Our Scene is London: Ben Jonson's City and the Space of the Author* (London: Routledge, 2008), 10.

[218] Lowenstein, 272.

[219] Edward Gieskes, "'Honesty and Vulgar Praise': The Poet's War and the Literary Field," *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 18 (2005), 89. Gieskes offers an otherwise compelling reading of *Poetaster* as "an attempt to shape the developing field of professional writing" (76) in which "Jonson turns what could have been a relatively minor professional conflict into a position-taking in the field of cultural production" (97).

[220] For Kidnie "this claim that his defence of the play was performed only once suggests that the dialogue was prohibited on stage." Kidnie (ed.), *Poetaster*, 452n.

[221] Koslow, 121.

[222] Rickard, 64.

Jonson "counts on exciting his audience by offering, through the artifice of the stage, the rare privilege of watching a great poet at work,"[223] but what Jonson really gives us (as in the "Apologetical Dialogue") is a great poet *interrupted* at work. Throughout *Poetaster* there is a sense that the poet is always on stage, an object of attention for spectators' eyes. When we first meet Horace he is "composing as he goes i' the street" (3.1.4), watched on by Crispinus. The supposedly private space of the study, meanwhile, is repeatedly rendered open to public view – for example when the informer Lupus presents Caesar with a "libel in picture" he has found after breaking into "this Horace his study" (5.3.38).

Perhaps surprisingly (certainly counterintuitively) Jonson uses the figure of Virgil to enact *Poetaster*'s most decisive undoing of the study/stage, poetry/theater binary. At the beginning of act 5 Caesar announces that Virgil has "come out of Campania" and returned to Rome now that he "hath finished all his *Aeneids*" (5.1.72-3). Coupled with his late arrival in the play, Virgil's geographical isolation implies a separation from the theatrical marketplace consistent with epic poetry's status as the most literary and stable of genres, far removed from the contingencies of live performance. Yet we quickly learn that Virgil has been summoned to the imperial court precisely in order to perform his poetry. His appearance onstage is teased for over seventy lines, as Caesar and an audience of poets including Horace lavish the epic poet with praise. Upon first glance, their assessments of Virgil's character (personal and textual) seem fully consonant with the masculine pole of the "*mollis/nervosus* or effeminate/virile opposition" that Hutson finds at the heart of the classical and early modern ideal of manly style.[224] Virgil is "judge[d]" by Horace to be "of a rectified spirit" (5.1.100) while his "clear and confident" writing reveals the "direct and analytic" nature of his "learning" (5.1.107-134). Gallus specifically commends the self-contained and *closed* nature of Virgil's poetry: "so chaste and tender is his ear" it will not allow any unworthy "syllable to pass" into his verse (5.1.108-109). It is easy to conclude, like Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, that Virgil thus "represents" an ideal "economy of bounded and regulated, 'proper' linguistic as well as moral/sexual practices, in contrast to the economy of 'licence' – again sexual as well as linguistic – which is represented within the play by Ovid and his circle (including the poetaster Crispinus)."[225] However, in describing Virgil's "ear" as "chaste and tender" Gallus draws attention to a penetrable orifice at the same time as he sexualizes it. Horace's description of Virgil's "poesy" as "rammed with life" further implies the threat of a penetrative assault from without.[226]

Upon his much-anticipated arrival, Caesar immediately makes a spectacle of the poet: "See, here comes Virgil" (5.2.1). The ensuing exchange thoroughly spectacularizes and sexualizes both the poet and his book:

> CAESAR Where are thy famous *Aeneids*? Do us grace
> To let us see, and surfeit on their sight.
> VIRGIL Worthless they are of Caesar's gracious eyes
> If they were perfect; much more, with their wants,
> Which yet are more than my time could supply;
> And could great Caesar's expectation
> Be satisfied with any other service,
> I would not show them.

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[223] Joan Carr, "Jonson and the Classics: The Ovid-Plot in *Poetaster*," *English Literary Renaissance* 8.3 (1978), 299.
[224] Hutson, "Civility and Virility," 4.
[225] Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, "Scenes of Translation in Jonson and Shakespeare: *Poetaster*, *Hamlet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Translation and Literature* 11.1 (2002), 18.
[226] See "rammed, adj. 1: Forced in; beaten hard." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/157827, (accessed 9 May 2023).

CAESAR Virgil is too modest,
Or seeks, in vain, to make our longings more.
Show them, sweet Virgil.
VIRGIL Then, in such due fear
As fits presenters of great works to Caesar,
I humbly show them –
[*He gives a copy of the poem to Caesar*]
CAESAR Let us now behold
A human soul made visible in life,
And more refulgent in a senseless paper
Than in the sensual complement of kings.
Read, read thyself, dear Virgil, let not me
Profane one accent with an untuned tongue:
Best matter, badly shown, shows worse than bad.
See then this chair, of purpose set for thee
To read thy poem in: refuse it not. (5.2.6-25)

Pleading with Virgil to let him "surfeit" on the "sight" of his "famous *Aeneids*," Caesar solicits the book itself as an object of visual pleasure. If, throughout the ensuing seduction, it is difficult to distinguish between Caesar's desire for Virgil and Caesar's desire for Virgil's poetry, this squares with the play's overarching conflation of the writer and his writing. Caesar's apparent metaphorization of the text as a body ("a human soul made visible in life") recalls similar passages from Jonson's *Discoveries* – but the context of his utterance encapsulates how thoroughly this metaphor is undone, literalized, in the theater, *where we do see Virgil*. Revelling in the experience of physical immediacy that the theater facilitates, Caesar wants more than Virgil's book: he wants Virgil himself to read his poetry aloud on the open stage.

The episode unfolds like a striptease, moving from Virgil's initial reticence to display his lines ("I would not show them"), through Caesar's repeated demand to "Show them," to the poet's climactic submission: "I humbly show them." The act of showing here takes on an eroticized air of self-display, of *self-exposure*. Caesar flirts with Virgil, accusing the poet of trying to turn him on by playing hard to get and "seek[ing], in vain, to make our longings more."[227] Having seduced – or compelled[228] – "sweet Virgil" into presenting his book to view, Caesar continues his stage-management of the poet's performance. Virgil is to sit in "this chair," the stage literally "*set* for thee / To read thy poem in." Despite Caesar's insistence that Virgil perform alone ("Read, read thyself, dear Virgil, let not me / Profane one accent with an untuned tongue") the emperor quickly reveals that he too will play a pivotal role in the production: "Ascend then, Virgil, and where first by chance / We here have turned thy book, do thou first read" (5.2.46-47). Caesar seeks to ensure that this is a private, closed performance: "Gentlemen of our chamber, guard the doors, / And let none enter" (5.2.54-55). Yet just as Virgil is described as "chaste" only to be immediately sexualized, his performance takes place in a private space that is suddenly violated. Barely forty lines into his recitation, Virgil is interrupted by Lupus and his cronies bursting into the throne room and accusing Horace of treason. The interruption of Virgil is a pivotal moment in *Poetaster*'s development of the penetrated/penetrating, open/closed, stage/page binaries. The masculinity of Virgil's poetry

[227] In the previous scene Caesar professes the same erotic "longings" for the poet/ry when he announces that Virgil "hath finished all his *Aeneids*, / Which, like another soul, I long t'enjoy" (5.1.73-74).
[228] Whether the "due fear" Virgil credits as the reason for his ultimate submission to Caesar is a genuine dread of the tyrant's wrath or simply a flirtatious complement depends on performance.

– the basis of its being the best poetry, and Virgil the best poet, in Rome – has supposedly been predicated on its boundedness, its virginal impermeability to penetration by other writers or audiences, and its private exclusivity. And yet when the master poet finally comes to perform his poetry, even he must embrace the openness and contingency of the public stage.

The open stage

From the outset, *Poetaster* confronts the sodomitical openness that early modern antitheatricalists attributed to the commercial theater. Ovid is interrupted in his study by his father who, having learned that his son has a play "coming forth for the common players there, called *Medea*," insists that the young poet's "name" will be "scorned and contemned in the eyes and ears of the best and gravest Romans" (1.2.2-11). Even worse, Ovid Senior fears that his son will be made "an ingle for players" (1.2.14) – in other words the passive, penetrated partner in the male-male sexual liaisons associated with early modern playhouses.[229] While refuting his father's allegations, Ovid employs similarly antitheatrical phraseology:

> They wrong me, sir, and do abuse you more,
> That blow your ears with these untrue reports.
> I am not known unto the open stage,
> Nor do I traffic in their theatres. (1.2.58-61)

Ovid's rejection of theater depends upon a complex interplay between its public ("open") and private dimensions (with the verb "traffic" suggesting, to early modern eyes and ears, "dealings of an illicit or secret character"[230]).[231] This blurring of the public/private binary was also central to attacks by early modern antitheatricalists. William Prynne distinguishes between "Those adulterers" who, having "sold their chastity, are ashamed to be seene in publicke," and the actors on a commercial stage: "this our publicke lewdnesse is acted in the open viewe of all men: the obscaenity of common whores is surpassed, and men have found out how they may commit adultery before the eyes of others."[232] As Katherine Maus observes, "Prynne describes the dramatic spectacle, whatever its apparent content, as essentially a sexual act performed before an audience."[233] The presence of the audience is key: Prynne ultimately seems less troubled by the "sexual act" itself than by its "publicke" and "open" nature (even implicitly commending "Those adulterers" whose sense of shame keeps their sins hidden). In *Poetaster* Tucca attacks theater precisely for making "publicke lewdnesse" out of private indiscretion:

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[229] The doubly abject status of the ingle – both sodomite and sodomized – is highlighted in the *OED* which defines "ingle" along with its synonym "catamite" as "A boy kept for homosexual practices; the passive partner in anal intercourse." "catamite, n.," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/28731 (accessed 9 May 2023). Later in the play Tucca reinforces the idea that the playhouse is a breeding ground for "ingles" (3.4.241). While Alan Sinfield rightly observes that "It is taken for granted that boys have sexual relations with players," his conclusion – that "The treatment of same-sex passion in this play is notably casual" – misses the intense anxiety that surrounds male-male desire, both in *Poetaster* and throughout the Jonson canon. Alan Sinfield, "*Poetaster*, the Author, and the Perils of Cultural Production," *Renaissance Drama* 27 (1996), 15-16.

[230] "traffic, v.," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/204334 (accessed 9 May 2023).

[231] As Bromley notes, while the terms "public" and "private" were used differently in the early modern period, the distinction remained central to determining the boundary between licit and illicit activities. Bromley, 27.

[232] Prynne, 331.

[233] Maus, "Horns," 569.

> Your courtier cannot kiss his mistress' slippers in quiet for 'em, nor your white innocent gallant pawn his revelling suit to make his punk a supper. An honest decayed commander cannot skelder, cheat, nor be seen in a bawdy house, but he shall be straight in one of their wormwood comedies. (1.3.44-49)

Mario DiGangi explains how secrecy, "As a symbol and support of orderly intimacy between men […] grounds the Renaissance discourse of friendship: in Jeremy Taylor's wonderfully resonant phrase, 'secrecy is the chastity of friendship.'"[234] By violating the secrecy guarantee at the heart of early modern friendship discourses the theater thus renders "orderly intimacy between men" *dis*orderly – in other words, sodomitical.[235]

According to antitheatricalists like Prynne, spectators at a play were not simply witnesses to sodomy. They were also actors in the sexualized encounter between stage and auditorium. Prynne laments "that lively action and representation of the Players themselves which put life and vigor into their Enterludes, and make them pierce more deepely into the Spectators eares and lewde affections, precipitating them on to lust."[236] Although Prynne figures playgoers as passively penetrated ("pierce[d]") by stage spectacle, they simultaneously take on an active role, "precipitat[ed]" to act on their "lust." Prynne repeatedly focuses on the bodily orifices that receive theatrical spectacle, describing the "lascivious whorish Actions" of the players "as so many fiery darts of Satan to wound our soul with lust; as so many conduit-pipes … to usher concupiscence into our hearts, thorow the doores, the portals of our eyes and ears."[237] Here, "eyes and ears" are cast as the passive receptors of Satan's "fiery darts" of "lust." Prynne was not alone in sexualizing the sensory organs. As Joseph Lenz explains, a diverse array of thinkers analogized the eye to the female genitalia:

> Drawings of the eye made by Roger Bacon, in the thirteenth century, and by Vesalius, the Belgian anatomist in the sixteenth, resemble drawings of the female sexual organs: images enter through the pupil and are channelled through the optic nerve into the brain, where, in Richard II's words, they "people this little world." The eyes are a channel, a vagina, if you will, the means through which the mind is impregnated with "all evilnesse and mischiefe."[238]

Tibor Fabiny similarly shows how early moderners inherited both pagan and Christian iconographies in which the ear "was frequently associated with the female genital organ."[239]

Yet early modern eyes and ears ultimately troubled any straightforward active/passive, male/female binary. Like Prynne, Anthony Munday describes eyes and ears as passive receptors, "two open windows" through which "death breaketh into the soul," while at the same time emphasizing the active volition of spectators who "vouchsafe to hear and behold such filthy things."[240] If eyes and ears are conceived of as "doores" and "windows," they are ways out of, as well as into, the body. Early modern anatomists were

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[234] Mario DiGangi, "Asses and Wits: The Homoerotics of Mastery in Satiric Comedy," *English Literary Renaissance* 25, no. 2 (1995), 195.

[235] Horace underscores the sodomitical implications of violating secrecy when he couples his claim that Crispinus and Demetrius "will reveal / Each secret that's committed to their trust" with the charge that they perform "basest offices" (5.3.303-6).

[236] Prynne, 931.

[237] Prynne, 375.

[238] Joseph Lenz, "Base Trade: Theater as Prostitution," *ELH* 60.4 (1993), 841. Lenz quotes the antitheatricalist John Northbrooke's fear of the "evilnesse and mischief" assaulting the eyes in playhouses.

[239] Tibor Fabiny, "The Ear as a Metaphor: Aural Imagery in Shakespeare's Great Tragedies and its Relation to Music and Time in *Cymbeline* and *Pericles*," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 11.1 (2005), 189.

[240] Munday, 96.

divided on the issue of whether eyes and ears were fundamentally receptive or projective. Theories of vision either adhered to a model of "intromission," whereby the eye was penetrated by external images, or "extromission," with eyebeams shot forth into the surrounding environment. Although the ear (or, as Helkiah Crooke termed it, the "hole of hearing"[241]) was generally characterized as the passive (feminine) receptor of sounds from without, as Allison Deutermann explain "these same anatomical texts" contain "contradictions" and "stress the ear's ability to deflect and moderate sounds."[242] Such a notion is suggested in *Poetaster* when Caesar initially refuses to hear Lupus's accusations against Horace: "bid the turbulent informer hence. / We have no vacant ear now to receive / The unseasoned fruits of his officious tongue" (5.3.14-16). In one sixteenth-century book of anatomy the ear is even described as an active (masculine) member, projecting out from the head because "it should keepe the hole that it standeth over, from things falling in, that might hinder the hearing."[243] Keith Botelho suggests that the ambiguous "relationship between gender and hearing in the early modern period is bound up in traditional representations of Rumor or Fama, an ambiguously gendered figure"[244] whose ears are both penetrated and penetrating, receiving the sounds of infamy and then sending them out again, into other ears.

Throughout *Poetaster* eyes and ears are alternately figured as active and passive, doer and done-to. Whereas Ovid Senior imagines the virile "eyes and ears of the best and gravest Romans" assaulting his son's reputation, Ovid Junior claims his father's "ears" are "blow[n]" with "untrue reports." After Caesar relents and gives audience to Lupus's tale of treason, he casts himself as the victim of an aural assault so severe it necessitates rescheduling Virgil's performance:

> Our ear is now too much profaned, grave Maro,
> With these distastes, to take thy sacred lines.
> Put up thy book till both the time and we
> Be fitted with more hallowed circumstance
> For the receiving so divine a labour. (5.3.145-149)

When Ovid is banished over his affair with Caesar's daughter, the ear is the sight of their final consummation – one in which the roles of male and female, penetrator and penetrated, are thoroughly confused as Julia tells the poet that "My soul, in this breath, enters thine ears" (4.10.70). The play's many references to the "open ear" (4.8.30) outnumber invocations of the eye, and critics often approach *Poetaster* as a play *about* hearing[245] – much as they sometimes define the theatre itself as primarily "a space of listening."[246] Certainly, hearing and seeing were often compared, hierarchized, and pitted against one another in the early modern period – not least by Jonson himself. Yet the very fact of their often being defined against one another registers the inextricability of "eyes and ears" which, from Prynne and Munday to *Poetaster*'s Ovid Senior, come as a pair. As we have seen, Jonson understood "Language" itself in audio-visual terms: "speake, that I may see thee." The supposed binary between sight and sound that has structured much criticism on Jonson specifically, and early modern drama more broadly, is reductive and misleading.

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[241] Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia: A Descripion of the Body of Man. Together with the Controversies Thereto Belonging* (London, 1615), Ccc6V.
[242] Deutermann, 231.
[243] Thomas Vicary, *The Anatomie of the Bodie of Man* (London, 1548), D2r.
[244] Keith Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses: Rumor and Early Modern Masculinity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3.
[245] For example, see Deutermann, 232-4.
[246] Botelho, 6.

So, too, are readings of *Poetaster* that suggest that Jonson uses Caesar as a mouthpiece for his own antitheatrical leanings.[247] Having been informed that Ovid, Julia, and a cohort of poets and citizens are staging a mock banquet of the gods, Caesar interrupts their play and frames it as an assault on his eyes and ears: "Have we our senses? Do we hear, and see?" (4.6.2) Shocked by their display of ontological transvestism, Caesar berates the assembled poets and citizens, drawing a typically antitheatrical distinction between truth and illusion:

CAESAR Say, sir, what are you?
ALBIUS I play Vulcan, sir.
CAESAR But what are you, sir?
ALBIUS Your citizen, and jeweller, sir.
CAESAR And what are you, dame?
CHLOË I play Venus, forsooth.
CAESAR I ask not what you play, but what you are!
CHLOË Your citizen, and jeweller's wife, sir.
CAESAR And you, good sir?
CRISPINUS Your gentleman parcel-poet, sir. (4.6.18-27)

Peter Womack reads this moment as a "bizarre and self-destructive piece of theatre" as Caesar's "singleness imposes theirs" and his intrusion "refixes the identities briefly loosened by play."[248] Such may be the fictional Caesar's intention, but the intensely metatheatrical bent of the exchange in performance – Caesar distinguishing between playing and being while he himself is being acted in a play – serves more to undermine the line between "what you play" and "what you are" than to reinforce it. Even on the page (without the metatheatrical dimension of live theater) Caesar's claim to self-unity falls apart under close scrutiny. Caesar seeks to contrast the blasphemous roleplay of the banquet with his own "actual" divinity:

If you think gods but feigned, and virtue painted,
Know we sustain an actual residence,
And with the title of an emperor,
Retain his spirit and imperial power[.] (4.6.46-49)

Yet when Maecenas implores Caesar to "forgive: be like the gods" (4.6.58), the emperor's godhead is reframed as a performance: he is not a god after all, but he can "*be like*" one.

Later, during his seduction of Virgil, Caesar himself undermines his own divinity, further suggesting that he too is just another player. At first Virgl resists Caesar's invitation to sit in the chair set for him beside the throne, fearing a breach of "decorum": "Poor virtue raised, high birth and wealth set under, / Crosseth heaven's courses, and makes worldlings wonder." The emperor iconoclastically insists: "The course of heaven and fate itself in this / Will Caesar cross, much more all worldly custom." Rejecting "worldly custom" as pertaining only to the "vast rude" multitude, Caesar claims that "reason" will "show *we are a man*, distinct by it, / From those that custom rapteth in her press" (5.2.32-45; my emphasis). If Caesar is also just a man playing a god (in a play), his supposedly antitheatrical insistence on the being/playing binary is decisively destabilized. The fact that he replaces Virgil's postponed poetic performance with the theatricalized ritual humiliation of Crispinus further troubles any straightforward assessment of Caesar as an antitheatricalist. Apart from Ovid, the mock banqueters go unpunished, and Caesar explains Ovid's exile as a direct consequence of his "violent wrong / In soothing the declined

[247] For a detailed corrective to this popular misreading, see James Loxley and Mark Robson, *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Claims of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 95-6.
[248] Womack, *Ben Jonson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 110-11.

affections / Of my base daughter" (4.6.51-53) – or, in the poet's words, of making a fool of the emperor "*behind his back*" (4.5.213; my emphasis).

He's behind you!

The Folio publication of *Poetaster* is prefaced by two letters: one addressed to Jonson's "Worthy Friend, Mr Richard Martin," and another addressed "To The Reader." Yet both epistles also contain a third address, to "posterity" – those that follow, or come behind, the poet.[249] Referring to the Poets' War, Jonson insists that he "take[s] no pleasure to revive the times, but that posterity may make a difference between their manners that provoked me then, and mine that neglected them ever."[250] Jonson suggests that his position in relation to "posterity" is vulnerable: his public image depends on how (or even if) future readers see the "difference" between him and his antagonists, Marston and Dekker. Jonson's preoccupation with "posterity" is not only confined to these letters, but is also central to his construction of a complex and anxious homoerotics of literary following in the play itself. Given *Poetaster*'s setting in an ancient Rome populated by legendary poets, the thematization of poetic influence and imitation seems inevitable. Moreover, among his contemporaries Jonson was considered a particularly ardent "follower" of classical writers, as in John Donne's Latin address "To the most friendly and deserving Ben Jonson":

> no one is such a follower of the ancients as you
> because you, restorer of the old, follow those you approve.
> Follow still what you pursue; and may your books
> be adorned with old age from their first hour.[251]

In Donne's poem Jonson is an eager "follower" in hot pursuit of his literary predecessors. Later in the seventeenth century John Dryden described Jonson's following of the ancients in even more aggressive terms:

> He was deeply conversant in the Ancients, both Greek and Latin, and he borrowed boldly from them: there is scarce a Poet or Historian among the Roman Authors of those times whom he has not translated in *Sejanus* or *Catiline*. But he has done his Robberies so openly, that one may see he fears not to be taxed by any Law. He invades Authors like a Monarch, and what would be theft in other poets, is only victory in him.[252]

In Dryden's account Jonson's borrowings from, and imitations of, precursor poets are figured in the language of penetrative violation as he "invades" their bodies of poetry.

In *Poetaster*, Jonson switches positions when he stages the penetrative threat that literary followers pose to their predecessors in the street encounter between Horace (Jonson) and Crispinus (Marston). Act three scene one begins with Horace, "composing as he goes i' the street," being followed by Crispinus, who resolves to imitate him: "I'll compose too" (3.1.5). Here the physical and the textual are inextricable as literary and bodily following intertwine – the imitator standing *behind* the model. In his account of the "sexual connotations of service" in early modern England, DiGangi considers how the "position" of the male body "in relation to other figures" carries erotic charge:

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[249] See "posterity, n.": etymologically derived from the Latin "*posterus*" – "later, next, following." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/148493 (accessed 9 May 2023).
[250] Jonson, "Apologetical Dialogue," lines 6-8.
[251] John Donne, "Amicissimo, & meritissimo BEN: IONSON" ("To the most friendly and deserving Ben Jonson"). Translation from John T. Shawcross (ed.), *The Poetry of John Donne* (New York: Anchor, 1967), 218.
[252] John Dryden, "An Essay of Dramatic Poesie," *The Works of John Dryden*, Vol. XVII, ed. Samuel Holt Monk (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 57.

> The sign of the usher's subservience is, paradoxically, his going before other people. In performing his duty the usher is seen from *behind* – a perspective from which he is subordinated and potentially eroticized. When perceived to be disorderly, the implicit eroticism of such positioning can be explicitly articulated as sodomy.[253]

Throughout act three scene one Crispinus's positioning as Horace's follower is presented as disorderly, an assault from behind. Walking behind Horace, Crispinus boasts about his imitative credentials ("I write just in thy vein" [3.1.19-20]) before extemporizing some choice lines, leading Horace to figure himself, in aside, as the victim of aural assault and invasion: "they are my ears / That must be tortured" and made "stalls / To his lewd solecisms and worded trash" (3.1.54-95). The effect of Crispinus's enthusiastic following finally centers on Horace's posterior: "my tame modesty / Suffers my wit be made a solemn ass / To bear his fopperies" (3.1.101-103). (Although the *OED* does not provide a citation linking "ass" and "arse" before 1860,[254] Frankie Rubinstein argues that the anal pun was already in circulation by the early seventeenth century, with Jonson and his contemporaries using "'ass' to pun on […] the ass that bears a burden and the arse that bears or carries in intercourse"[255]). Finding that his "wit," his "ass," can no longer "bear" Crispinus's "fopperies," Horace eventually asks his follower if they can switch positions: "Nay then, I am desperate. I follow you, sir. 'Tis hard contending with a man that overcomes thus" (3.1.208-209).

Ultimately, relations between writers in *Poetaster* blur penetrative as well as temporal hierarchies and distinctions. To Dryden's coupling of *Sejanus* and *Catiline* we should add *Poetaster* as a play where "scarce a Poet or Historian among the Roman Authors" is "not translated." Act three scene one – our introduction to Jonson's Horace – is itself a partial translation of the historical Horace's *Satires* I.1. As Victoria Moul points out, "As an authorial strategy this is both aggressively self-confident (because it associates Jonson with Horace himself) and strikingly submissive (where is Jonson if so much of this is Horace?)."[256] Where Moul understands the relationship between Jonson and his predecessor Horace in terms of aggression and submission, I propose that *Poetaster* invites us to think of literary influence and community in terms of mutual penetration. Just as Jonson's writing is penetrated by the influence – indeed the very words – of his predecessor, Horace's writing is invaded through Jonson's staging of it and ultimately reformed in Jonson's own image. Later in the play Demetrius (Dekker) mocks Horace "for his arrogancy and his impudence in defending his own things, and for his translating: I can trace him, i'faith. Oh, he is the most open fellow living" (4.3.109-111). While it might be tempting to conclude that Crispinus speaks "obstusely,"[257] taken as a whole *Poetaster* affirms, rather than denies, that relations between writers are structured around a mutual openness to creative interpenetration. Upon close inspection, none of the writers staged in *Poetaster*, ancient or Elizabethan, speak purely in their own words. In the opening scene of the play, the lines Ovid recites from one of his elegies have been translated by Jonson – but only "slightly adapted from Marlowe's translation" of the same poem.[258] When Virgil reads

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[253] DiGangi, 201.
[254] "ass, n.2," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/11703, (accessed 9 May 2023).
[255] "Ass," in Frankie Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and Their Significance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984), 17.
[256] Victoria Moul, "Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*: Classical Translation and the Location of Cultural Authority," *Translation and Literature* 15.1 (2006), 21.
[257] Hutson, "Liking Men: Ben Jonson's Closet Opened," *ELH* 71.4 (2004), 1095n.
[258] Kidnie (ed.), *Poetaster*, 429n.

from his "*Aeneids*," it is in Jonson's idiom again – but this time filtered through the translation of Jonson's Elizabethan predecessor, Surrey.[259] Blurring authorial boundaries even more radically, when Virgil defends Horace's passion for "translating men" (5.3.333) he does so in Horace's own words, via Jonson's loose translation of Horace's *Satires* I.3.25-7.[260] Rickard, quoting Jorge Luis Borges's proposal that "every writer creates his own precursors," suggests that in *Poetaster* "Jonson would seem to give us an extreme example of that phenomenon: this play attempts to create Marlowe, Marston, Dekker, Horace, Ovid, and Virgil."[261] Indeed – but *Poetaster* also shows the extent to which Jonson, as he creates his precursors, is also created by them, even representing himself as Jonson *in Horace's person*.

Rickard usefully highlights how *Poetaster* is "distinctive in the kinds of temporal disruptions it creates" through its writerly interpenetrations, such that when Ovid recites lines from Marlowe's translation of his elegy, the "classical poet is … quoting his Elizabethan descendant."[262] *Poetaster*'s arsy-versy, preposterous temporal framework invites us to think more fully about how queerly Jonson's play conceives of encounters between writers past and present. I argue that in *Poetaster* Jonson explores a "cruisy relation with the past," a kind of relation proposed by Bromley in his essay on "Cruisy Historicism." Bromley explains that the historicism he proposes "is 'cruisy' not only because it offers a reading of representations of cruising, but also because it derives its methodology from those representations":

> As an embodied practice, cruising entails shuttling back and forth and surveying a scene for erotic opportunities and interested partners. Translating the corporeal and phenomenological to the epistemological, the peripatetics of cruising offer a useful model for how we might permit conceptual and temporal shifts when considering a reader's textual encounter with the past and attending to his or her location in the present.[263]

Poetaster is an exercise in "shuttling back and forth" and "surveying" the literary "scene" for explicitly homoeroticized encounters between literary figures. We may even approach act three scene one as a particularly "embodied" exercise in such cruisy encounters. In his reading of Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Bromley focuses on "the parading in Paul's Walk" as an example of "early modern cruising" and "Jonson's representation of a sexual culture based on display."[264] In (coincidentally?) act three scene one of *EMO*, lavishly dressed gallants walk up and down the middle aisle of St. Paul's, inviting attention from strangers in the same way that Horace begins act three scene one of *Poetaster*, parading his poetry through the streets of Rome. Perhaps he is disappointed that it ends up being Crispinus's attentions that he attracts (although he does protest a little too much) – but he is certainly cruising the streets, self on display, for someone, or something.[265] Jonson, in Horace, wants to be looked at.

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[259] Robert Cummings and Charles Martindale, "Jonson's Virgil: Surrey and Phaer," *Translation and Literature* 16.1 (2007), 67.
[260] Moul, 29.
[261] Rickard, 80.
[262] Rickard, 57.
[263] Bromley, 21-2.
[264] Bromley 27; 44.
[265] Mark Turner emphasizes that "cruising is a *process* of walking, gazing, and engaging another (or others), and it is not necessarily about sexual contact. Sex may be the point of cruising for some, but cruising and having sex are different interactions." Mark Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), 60.

Mutual love

During his encounter in the street with Horace, Crispinus expresses a desire to enter into the poet's circle of friends, united under the patronage of Maecenas. When Crispinus comes up with a plan to supplant the other member of this social network, Horace launches into a defence of Maecenas "and his house":

> There's no man grieved that this is thought more rich,
> Or this more learned; each man hath his place,
> And to his merit, his reward of grace,
> Which with a mutual love they all embrace. (3.1.226-236)

Later, as the poets assembled for Virgil's performance heap praises on the master writer, Caesar declares that "This one consent in all your dooms of him, / And mutual loves of all your several merits, / Argues a truth of merit in you all" (5.1.139-141). In the closing speech of the play Caesar again commends the group of poets: "Be you yourselves. / And as with our best favours you stand crowned, / So let your mutual loves be still renowned" (5.3.571-573). "Mutual love" between poets is celebrated as the telos of artistic creation.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the play's bellicose context and content, the significance of mutual love in *Poetaster* has generally been overlooked. Certainly, both the action of the play and Jonson's own career belie Horace's evocation of a harmoniously hierarchical literary community housed under Maecenas's roof. Yet *Poetaster* does imagine a system of mutual love – one that is altogether more volatile, versatile, eroticized, and vexed. Caesar's concluding paean to mutual love follows the climax of the play – the sodomitical and scatological ritual humiliation of Crispinus. Critics have traditionally understood Crispinus's purging as an act of exclusion, but it actually functions as a rite of *initiation*. It is also explicitly presented as a piece of theater. After Caesar's ear is "too much profaned" to take any more of Virgil's lines, he invites Horace and his friends to provide alternative afternoon entertainment. Upon learning that they already have a "design" in mind, Caesar commands them to "Proceed": "and ourself / Will here sit by, spectator of your sports" (5.3.142-149).

In what might best be described as an act of hazing, Jonson – lifting an episode from Lucian's *Lexiphanes* – has Horace administer a purgative to Crispinus which forces him to vomit forth obscure words, words quoted directly from Marston's writings. Caesar, Maecenas, et al do not only watch but also actively, physically collaborate in – and enjoy – the process. Horace, waiting for the pill to take effect with the spectatorial glee of a Marlovian villain ("My physic begins to work with my patient, I see" [5.3.392]), may even physically support Crispinus while holding a vessel to receive the vomited vocabulary: "A basin, a basin, quickly; our physic works. Faint not man" (5.3.426). As no fewer than twenty-nine words are spewed up, Caesar, Gallus, Tibullus, Maecenas, and Horace take it in turns to comment on the relative ease or difficulty Crispinus experiences with each new expulsion: "they came up easy […] That came up somewhat hard […] That *clumsy* stuck terribly […] *Clutched*? It's well that's come up. It had but a narrow passage" (5.3.435-475). Crispinus, having difficulty bringing up more words but refusing to take another pill, is urged by Horace to "Force yourself then a little with your finger" (5.3.467) while Virgil implores the other men to physically intervene: "Help him – it sticks strangely, whatever it is […] Hold him; hold his head there" (5.3.472-478).

The repeated emphasis on Crispinus's digestive orifices and their passability (in terms of looseness or tightness); the physical restraint imposed upon the ritual victim; the hyper-masculine group dynamic of mutual egging-on: all of these are the hallmarks of gang rape. The pleasure is violent and vicious, the humiliation brutal, but the effect is

ambivalent: when Horace asks Crispinus "How do you feel yourself?" once he has finished with him, the poetaster replies that he is "Pretty and well, I thank you" (5.3.484-485). The ultimate goal of Crispinus's purging-cum-initiation-ceremony, moreover, is to make him a better poet – to *include* him in the literary community. Virgil "prescribes[s]" him "A strict and wholesome diet" that involves reading the pantheon of ancient writers so that his own vocabulary becomes "more sound and clear" (5.3.491-515). The final measure taken against Crispinus – "the oath for good behaviour" – similarly seeks to reform the poetaster while including him within the literary scene:

> You shall here solemnly contest and swear, that never, after this instant, either at booksellers' stalls, in taverns, twopenny rooms, 'tiring houses, noblemen's butteries, puisnes' chambers (the best and farthest places where you are admitted to come) you shall once offer, or dare (thereby to endear yourself the more to any player, ingle, or guilty gull in your company) to malign, traduce, or detract the person or writings of Quintus Horatius Flaccus[.] (5.3.538-549)

The oath administered to Crispinus might prevent him from slandering Horace, but it also encourages him to continue to cruise the early modern sites – the "booksellers' stalls" and "taverns" and "twopenny rooms" – where theater folk encountered one another. In Dekker's *Satiromastix*, the Horace-Jonson of that play is similarly banned from boasting in – but still permitted to parade himself around – "Lordes roomes" and "Booke-binders shops" and "Tavernes."[266]

As we have seen in the "Apologetical Dialogue," even that most supposedly private of spaces – the author's study – might function as a space for public self-display. If the "Apologetical Dialogue" destabilizes the binary between image and word, looks and lines, it also subtly undermines any notion of the poet as a self-generating artificer. At the end of the dialogue the Author likens his writings to "long-watched labours": "Things that were born when none but the still night / And his dumb candle saw his pinching throes" (213-215). If Jonson's writings are babies, who is the father? The most obvious answer is that he has been inspired – and so inseminated – by other writers. Perhaps because it is such a familiar convention, critics have ignored (or talked around) the strangeness of the early modern analogy between artistic inspiration and semen. In Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, for example, Jack Wilton waxes lyrical in praise of the poet Surrey before suddenly stopping for fear that "I *spend all my spirits* in praising him, and leave myself no vigor of wit or effects of a soul to go forward with my history."[267] Turning to Jonson, Maus observes (rather obliquely) that his "anxieties about the relative scarcity and non-renewability of *creative substance* apply not just to himself, but to the entire artistic community. In *Epigrams* 79 Jonson explains that Sidney was unable to beget a son because he expended the available resources in other [poetic] endeavours."[268] Given Jonson's sense of the "scarcity" of "*creative substance*," it is noteworthy that when Horace first encounters Crispinus in the street, he spots semen stains on the poetaster's trousers: "your ample velvet hose are not without evident stains of a hot disposition naturally" (3.1.58-59). Crispinus is a bad poet, it seems, because he is wasting semen. If poetic inspiration is like semen, and writers are impregnated by the creative juices of other writers, when Demetrius brands Horace "a mere sponge" who "goes up and down sucking from every society" (4.3.94-96) we are left in little doubt about what exactly Horace is soaking up.

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[266] Dekker, *Satiro-mastix*, lines 2614-37.
[267] Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller, or, The Life of Jacke Wilton*, ed. H.F.B. Brett-Smith (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 65; my emphasis.
[268] Maus, "Economies," 62; my emphasis.

As the climactic sequence of *Poetaster* progresses, from Virgil's reading to Crispinus's purging, the seemingly symbolic openness of the author becomes increasingly physicalized. The homoerotic charge that has been building up over the course of the play intensifies after Virgil's performance and is finally discharged via the purging – and figurative gang rape – of Crispinus. By the end of the play, then, the blurring of authorial boundaries involves more than an exchange of words: the authors' *bodies* overlap and interpenetrate as all lay hands on Crispinus. If the climax of the play reads like a statement of mastery over the baser elements of the "open stage" – represented by Crispinus's sodomitically opened, vomiting body – the ritual also reveals Jonson's fundamental embrace of the physicality of playmaking. Indeed, the theater appeals to Jonson precisely because there, and only there, can the creative interpenetrations upon which the mutual love between poets depends be fully embodied. Of course, for a poet who inherited and admired a classical tradition that equated manliness with closedness, being opened by the stage was a source of anxiety, even resistance. Perhaps *Poetaster* is best understood as Jonson's *active submission* to this openness; as both doer and done-to, Jonson's relationship to the theater itself is decidedly queer.

3. "All gaze and bent of amorous view": *Troilus and Cressida* and the queer gaze

> Doe thei not induce Whoredome and vncleannesse? Nay, are thei not rather plaine deuourers of maidenly virginitie and chastitie? For proofe whereof, but marke the flockyng and runnyng to Theaters and Curtens, daylie and hourelie, night and daie, tyme and tide, to see Playes and Enterludes, where suche wanton gestures, such bawdie speeches: suche laughyng and flearyng: suche kissyng and bussyng: suche clippyng and culling: such wincking and glauncing of wanton eyes, and the like is vsed, as is wonderfull to beholde. Then these goodly Pageantes beyng doen, euery mate sortes to his mate, euery one brynges an other homewarde of their waie very freendly, and in their secrete conclaues (couertly) thei plaie the *Sodomits*, or worse.
>
> Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomy of Abuses*[269]

> Eternal reader, you have here a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar, and yet passing full of the palm comical.
>
> *A Never Writer to an Ever Reader. News.*[270]

> Now they are clapper-clawing one another. I'll go look on.
>
> Thersites, *Troilus and Cressida* (5.4.1-2)

According to the Arden Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida: A Critical Reader*, "the role that the construction of Shakespeare's imagined audience has played in critical readings" of the play "cannot be overstated."[271] Prompted by the perplexing survival of two rival Quartos printed in 1609 – the first advertising the play as having been "acted by the Kings Maiesties seruants at the Globe,"[272] the second insisting conversely that the work is entirely "new" to the page and "never staled with the stage"[273] – critics have indeed long

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[269] Stubbes, 90v-91r.

[270] So begins the antitheatrical Epistle added to the second "state" of the 1609 Quarto publication of *Troilus and Cressida*. Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Bevington, 145. Subsequent citations from the play proper will appear parenthetically in the text.

[271] Johann Gregory, "The State of the Art," in "*Troilus and Cressida": A Critical Reader*, ed. Efterpi Mitsi (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

[272] This claim regarding the play's theatrical provenance appears on the title-page of the first "state" of the 1609 Quarto. *Troilus and Cressida* (Bevington), 148.

[273] A Never Writer's denial of *Troilus and Cressida*'s theatrical provenance is contradicted by both the other Quarto's staging claim and the play's earlier 1603 entry into the Stationer's Register where it is described as having been "acted by my lo: Chamberlens Men" (W.W. Greg, *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, vol. 1 [London: Bibliographical Society, 1939], 18). Critics still eager to account for the variant Quarto's elitist epistle have therefore developed an alternative theory: the play *was* performed, but definitely *not* for the unwashed masses. Following Peter Alexander's influential thesis that *Troilus and Cressida* was written for a one-off "festivity at one of the Inns of Court" (Peter Alexander, "*Troilus and Cressida*, 1609," *The Library* 4, no. 9 [1928-29], 278-9), W.R. Elton channels A Never Writer's snobbery in asserting that only a "festive law audience" would have been capable of understanding the play's "allusions" which would "have eluded the capacities of the Epistle's 'vulger'" (W.R. Elton, *Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" and the Inns of Court Revels* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000], 168). Yet it makes little sense that Shakespeare – a commercial playwright who necessarily wrote for mass production – would have written a play that was not at least *intended* for widespread public performance. Ultimately, whether or not *Troilus and*

agonized over the mysteries of if, where, and for whom *Troilus and Cressida* was performed during Shakespeare's lifetime, producing a "persistent uncertainty about who the intended audience of the play really is."[274] However, in focusing on such (ultimately unanswerable) questions about the identities of the play's original spectators, critics have tended to overlook the extent to which *Troilus and Cressida* is *about* spectatorship as it was experienced by early modern theatergoers.[275] I argue that in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare not only considers what his customers were doing when they came to watch one of his plays but also *why* they might have been drawn to the theater in the first place.[276]

One of the chief pleasures *Troilus and Cressida* offered early modern spectators was seeing themselves – in their role as participants in the theatrical process – become the focus of the drama. The play's "obsession with viewing and being viewed"[277] along with Shakespeare's creation of "exceptionally metatheatrical figures"[278] have long been noted. In the first section of this chapter I argue that the principal action of *Troilus and Cressida* is spectatorship itself, with all of the play's key scenes foregrounding and investigating the multifarious pleasures and anxieties potentially stimulated by looking or being looked at. The play's intense metatheatricality works to bring spectators into the drama. As Shakespeare's characters self-consciously stage how they themselves react to what they see, agonizing over how their watching, their audience response, is being seen and evaluated by others, spectatorship is conceptualized as a theatrical performance.

Indeed, throughout *Troilus and Cressida* characters find themselves enmeshed in complex looking relations which ultimately erase any distinction between actor and spectator, subject and object of the gaze. Early modern theatergoers likewise habitually experienced such supposedly fixed binary positions as ever-shifting and unstable. As I argued in the first chapter, critics of renaissance drama have often relied too heavily on notions of "the gaze" originating in film theory. Barbara Hodgson argues that "as in classical Hollywood cinema," the play's "relentless focus on male surveillance … privileges the male gaze as well as the male project called the play, offering males particular, and particularly gendered specular competence, or what Laura Mulvey has called 'visual pleasure.'"[279] Yet while Mulvey's seminal theorization of the gaze has proved useful in considering the play's objectification of female beauty,[280] any account of *Troilus and Cressida* relying fully upon her paradigm of the heterosexual male cinemagoer must

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Cressida was staged at the original Globe, my examination of the play reveals that it is both designed for, and a meditation on, the spectating conditions of early modern London's open-air amphitheaters.

[274] Daniel Juan Gil, *Before Intimacy: Asocial Sexuality in Early Modern England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 79.

[275] For some notable exceptions see Gregory and Leonard, "Assuming Gender," 44-61; Gregory, "Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*: Audience Expectation and Matters of Taste in Relation to Authorship and the Book" (doctoral thesis, Cardiff University, 2013).

[276] Composed at the turn of the seventeenth century, *Troilus and Cressida* has been read by many – most convincingly by Bednarz – as Shakespeare's intervention (against Ben Jonson) in the Poets' War. Shakespeare's attention to the dynamics of spectatorship should therefore be placed in the context of a "cultural moment of intense self-reflexivity" when "audiences as well as poets and players were subjected to a unique dramatization of theater." James Bednarz, 30.

[277] Gretchen Minton, "'Discharging less than the tenth part of one': Performance Anxiety and/in *Troilus and Cressida*," in *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, ed. Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 116. I would add to Minton's formulation a third "obsession" of the play – being viewed viewing.

[278] Bridget Escolme, *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, Performance, Self* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 46.

[279] Hodgson, 258.

[280] See Charnes, 437.

offer an extremely limited view of Shakespeare's text while ignoring entirely the material conditions of early modern playing. The cinema screen reveals

> a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy. Moreover, the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. … Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer.[281]

Such conditions are precisely those *not* experienced by early modern theatergoers.[282] Instead of isolating "spectators from one another" or repressing "their exhibitionism," shared lighting amphitheaters such as the Globe cultivated what Lars Engle terms "a community of mutual regard"[283] where, as Kent Cartwright explains, playgoers are "physically present to each other" and "recognize their own and others' reactions."[284]

Moreover, unlike in the cinema (or, to a lesser extent, the modern proscenium arch theater),[285] early modern actors *looked back* at spectators, creating conditions for an endlessly mobile mutual gaze thoroughly destabilizing any putative subject-object hierarchy. In the second section of this chapter I argue that just as Shakespeare's play destabilizes any distinction between subject and object of the gaze, the volatile and various looking relations inhering in open-air amphitheaters (and their erasure of the actor/spectator dichotomy) suggests that the early modern theatrical gaze was *always* – at least potentially – queer. Along with the "heterosexual male" gaze outlined by Hodgson, in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare alternately imagines (while public theatrical performance created the conditions for) heterosexual female and homosexual gazes. Over the course of the play its characters also indulge in (and are sometimes tortured by) a range of disruptive desires including fetishism and troilism.[286] Thus the gaze in *Troilus and Cressida* is queer both in the play's envisaging of deviant sexualities and in the broader, "metaphorical sense" proposed by Anna Kérchy for whom "queering is all about hijacking the normativizing gaze" and its "gendered distribution of power positions within the regime of spectatorship and visibility (one that hierarchically orders the active masculine spectator above the passive, eroticized, feminized object to be looked at)."[287]

In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare explores how the frisson of unpredictability and possibility emanating from such queerly mobile looking relations is central to

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[281] Mulvey, 9.
[282] Such conditions are, however, much like those governing proscenium arch theater, which may partly account for the tendency amongst modern critics to view early modern drama through a cinematic lens.
[283] Engle, 191.
[284] Cartwright, 25.
[285] The difference between early modern amphitheaters and modern proscenium arch conditions is not absolute, however; as Gay McAuley notes, even in today's playhouses "the live presence of both performers and spectators creates complex flows of energy between both groups." Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 247.
[286] For a discussion of Hector's armour fetish as a "passion" that "amounts to infidelity" see R.W. Maslen, "Armour that doesn't work: An Anti-meme in Medieval and Renaissance Romance," in *Medieval into Renaissance: Essays for Helen Cooper*, ed. Andrew King and Matthew Woodcock (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2016), 53. The uncannily named troilism, meanwhile – a "sexual activity in which one person (a troilist) enjoys observing his or her usual partner in sexual activities with a third person" (*American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology Online*, "troilism," noun, 1) – is precisely what Troilus engages in as he spies on Cressida and Diomedes in 5.2.
[287] Kérchy, 64.

spectatorship's erotic charge. Readers of the play have been too quick to conclude that it shares A Never Writer's virulent antitheatricalism. Far from expressing "revulsion from the theatre" and "antagonism towards its" spectators,[288] or revealing Shakespeare's (financially reckless) "'supreme indifference' about the tastes of his audience,"[289] *Troilus and Cressida* instead both thematizes the pleasures of spectatorship and offers those very pleasures to those watching the play. Instead of assuming, as has been the fashion, that A Never Writer's vehement denial of the play's theatrical provenance bespeaks its failure to please on the stage,[290] I explore an alternative possibility: that A Never Writer saw only too clearly the extent and variety of the pleasures *Troilus and Cressida* invites its spectators to participate in. Like many an early modern antitheatricalist, the writer of the epistle protests a little too much.

Its offer of the potential thrill of queer gazing, and queer cruising – finding and locking "wanton eyes" with a "mate" in the crowd, as Stubbes imagines, and returning home with them to "plaie the *Sodomits*" – undoubtedly contributed at least in part to the popularity of a commercial theater which necessarily had to please and cater to a variety of tastes and inclinations. In the final part of this chapter I argue that in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare considers further dimensions of the theater's appeal as a space in which paying customers could indulge in the pleasure of being looked at – and even cultivate their own public persona. Today we live "in a world in which the dominant mode of 'publishing' identity is visual" and our celebrities are famous "because we see their faces," Linda Charnes observes, before noting that "a similar fantasy about the visual runs throughout *Troilus and Cressida*."[291]

The demographics of the theater industry in early modern London – a small number of professional actors in a handful of theaters staging plays for a few thousand habitual spectators – created a system wherein Andrew Gurr suggests "the players were more familiar to their audiences as themselves, star players, than as the characters they portrayed."[292] Taking Gurr's contention to its logical conclusion, if the players were instantly recognizable to the playgoers, the playgoers – comprising a small portion of the population returning to the theater again and again – must equally have been recognizable to the players, and to each other, *as theater people*. The commercial theater, that much-lamented "place of licentiousnesse," was a venue to which "the gallants of the kingdom flocke[d] to see, *and to be seen*, and not all to good ends."[293] Some people went to the theater not, primarily, to watch the onstage play at all, but rather to perform for their fellow playgoers. Theaters thus functioned as spaces in which actors and spectators alike – perhaps better thought of collectively as actor-spectators, given the ever-shifting instability of these positions – could engage in a "publishing" of their own (or another's) identity and work to

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[288] Kiernan Ryan, "*Troilus and Cressida*: The perils of presentism," in *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (New York: Routledge, 2007), 183. For David Hillman *Troilus and Cressida* is literally disgusting, with its alimentary imagery moving from "culinary preliminaries" through "rancid leftovers" and ending with "Pandarus's stomach turning epilogue" producing a "bulimic play, one that evokes in its audience … a reaction akin to the figurative nausea of the imagistic trajectory." Hillman concludes that it is "little wonder" the play "was apparently 'never staled with the Stage' in Shakespeare's time, and that audiences still find it somewhat unpalatable." David Hillman, "The Gastric Epic: *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1997), 304.

[289] Eric Byville, "Aesthetic Uncommon Sense: Early Modern Taste and the Satirical Sublime," *Criticism* 54, no. 4 (2012), 609.

[290] For example, see Ryan, 164; Hillman, 304.

[291] Charnes, 433. For Charnes this is "a fantasy deployed to counteract the void of rhetorical citationality" confronting the play's legendary characters (434).

[292] Gurr, *Playgoing*, 126.

[293] Harrison, fol. 78-79; emphasis mine.

build an early modern social network, forging bonds of recognition and attraction not only transgressing the line between stage and auditorium but also extending (just as the antitheatricalists feared) far beyond the walls of the theater itself, into the outside world.

"Here we may see most bravely": spectatorship as performance

In Shakespeare's play the doomed love affair between Troilus and Cressida is bookended by two lengthy scenes amounting to virtual orgies of the onstage gaze, scenes which operate in many ways as mirror images of one another.[294] Cressida's very first lines make spectatorship the object of attention in a manner characteristic of the rest of the play:

CRESSIDA
Who were those went by?
ALEXANDER Queen Hecuba and Helen.
CRESSIDA
And whither go they?
ALEXANDER Up to the eastern tower,
Whose height commands as subject all the vale,
To see the battle. (1.2.1-4)

Throughout *Troilus and Cressida* warfare is imagined (and practiced) in terms of theatrical production and reception. Here the Trojan conflict is also figured as "a form of male performance for female consumption"[295] as Alexander pictures Hecuba and Helen staking out a viewing position from which to "subject" male bodies at war to their female gaze (indeed, for the most part it is the male rather than the female body which is held up to view in *Troilus and Cressida*). Act 1 scene 2 thus sets in motion the play's queer destabilizing of normatively gendered hierarchies of looking which I will later explore more fully. For now, my focus is on how this exchange reveals that spectators themselves are the play's principal spectacle: Cressida and Alexander watch Hecuba and Helen as they make their way to their theater of war, much as Stubbes implores his readers to "marke" early modern Londoners "flockyng and runnyng to Theaters and Curtens." The issue of these playgoers' visual identifiability to one another is also already brought into focus as Cressida's bizarre inability to recognize her fellow Trojan women introduces what Charnes describes as "the play's matrix of recognition/misrecognition and identification"[296] as its characters repeatedly find themselves uncertain – and seeking confirmation – about *who they are looking at*. Almost immediately Cressida again asks, "Who comes here?" only to be informed that this time it is her "*uncle* Pandarus" (1.2.36-37; emphasis mine). Pandarus's outraged response to Cressida's (disingenuous) denial of her preference for Troilus over Hector – "Do you know a man if you see him?" (1.2.62-63) – is a question haunting the rest of the play.

What follows is a frenzy of identification-by-looking, as Cressida's uncle Pandarus enters and commands her to watch (and how to watch) the Trojan heroes returning from battle, prancing and preening their way homeward "in a kind of beauty pageant"[297] – or Las Vegas Chippendales show:

PANDARUS Shall we stand up here and see them as they pass toward Ilium?
Good niece, do, sweet niece Cressida.

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[294] See Hodgson's discussion of the two scenes' "rhymed – and regendered – looking relations." Hodgson, 278.
[295] Francesca Rayner, "The Performance History," in *A Critical Reader*, 55.
[296] Charnes, 434.
[297] Gregory and Leonard, 50.

CRESSIDA At your pleasure.
PANDARUS Here, here, here's an excellent place; here we may see most bravely. I'll tell you them all by their names as they pass by, but mark Troilus above the rest. (1.2.172-78)

Pandarus's command to come "up here" onto a raised platform is suggestive of spectators going *onstage* to watch the show. The sense of spectators invading the playing space and usurping theatrical attention can be further amplified in performance: although stage directions call for the warriors one by one to enter and "*pass over the stage*" none of them actually speak, and in at least one modern production the actors in this pageant were deemed entirely unnecessary, with only their spectators Cressida and Pandarus appearing onstage.[298] That spectatorship is imagined as a kind of theatrical performance in its own right, meanwhile, is signalled by Pandarus's desire to watch "bravely," a word which in Shakespeare's day could describe an action undertaken "in a showy manner" as well as its familiar primary meaning "courageously."[299] Although Cressida and Pandarus are ostensibly positioned as spectators to this macho parade, they emerge as the event's principal performers.

Just as the scene blurs the distinction between actor and spectator, so too does it suggest that looking, as well as being looked at, may be a source of both the "pleasure" and the "shame" (1.2.222) alternately invoked by Cressida. For his part Pandarus makes no effort to conceal his homosexual lusting after the warriors' bodies,[300] his excitement building with each passing Trojan before reaching an orgasmic crescendo when Troilus finally appears:

> O brave Troilus! Look well upon him, niece, look you how his sword is bloodied, and his helm more hacked than Hector's, and how he looks, and how he goes! O admirable youth! He ne'er saw three-and-twenty. Go thy way, Troilus, go thy way! Had I a sister were a grace, or a daughter a goddess, he should take his choice. O admirable man! (1.2.223-29)

Pandarus's antics here are fundamentally attention-seeking: he shouts encouragement at Troilus ("go thy way!") because he wants the young prince to *look back at him*. Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern characterize Pandarus's "trademark position" as being "caught between voyeurism and solicitation"[301] – an insight which, I argue, could equally be applied to the play's paying spectators. Before Troilus makes his longed-for appearance Pandarus has already expressed his desire to be recognized and acknowledged by the object of his lascivious gaze – "I'll show you Troilus anon; if he see me, you shall see him nod at me" (1.2.187-88). As Shakespeare's use of the popular Elizabethan pun on "die" makes clear, for Pandarus being looked at by Troilus is the stuff orgasms are made of: "I could live and die i'th'eyes of Troilus" (1.2.234-35). The play's Arden editor muses that

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[298] William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, dir. Howard Davies, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford, June 25, 1985.

[299] "bravely, adv." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/22793 (accessed 10 May 2023). The potential slippage between these two meanings is in fact entirely apposite for a play throughout which warfare is insistently theatricalized and martial valour thoroughly hollowed out.

[300] Branding him a "Scene Queen," Sinfield describes Pandarus as being "infatuated with Troilus" and offers an insightful reading of how he "cruises like a queer" during a brief encounter with Paris's servant later in the play. Sinfield, "The Leather Men and the Lovely Boy: Reading Positions in *Troilus and Cressida*," in *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 381. Certainly in this scene Pandarus frames spectatorship in terms of his own homosexualized male gaze (twice observing that it "does a man's heart good" to ogle at the heroes [1.2.197]) despite the fact that he has supposedly engineered the episode in order to expose Troilus to Cressida's female gaze.

[301] Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 226.

"perhaps" the last phrase is better glossed as "looking at Troilus"[302] but this denotational doubleness is in fact entirely appropriate to Pandarus's fantasy of sharing a *mutual* gaze with his crush while also characteristic of the uncertainty throughout *Troilus and Cressida* about who is looking at who, and to what end. Similar instability hovers around Pandarus's repeated exhortation "Look how he looks!" (1.2.194) – is Cressida to admire the warrior's physical appearance (*what* he looks like) or his gaze (*how* he looks at others)? For Pandarus, such blurred lines – between spectator and spectacle, subject and object of the gaze – stimulate intense visual pleasure.

For Cressida, however, Pandarus's shameless attention-seeking is a source of anxiety and embarrassment. Like Mulvey's cinemagoer, Cressida apparently wants to watch covertly, unobserved – "Speak not so loud," she admonishes her over-eager uncle as soon as the show begins (1.2.179), finally losing her temper with his focus-grabbing exclamations when Troilus appears: "Peace, for shame, peace!" (1.2.222). Cressida's "shame" stems from the same source as Pandarus's arousal: the possibility of these performers (much like early modern players) looking back at her, seeing her looking at them; and the concomitant fear that Troilus in particular will interpret such looking as sexual desire and solicitation – as a supplication. As Cressida fears, a subject looking at an object may thus find themselves *subjected to* that object. Being looked at meanwhile does not necessarily entail subjugation and may even work to confer great power and authority on the object of the gaze (as we shall see later with Achilles). Nevertheless, even within this scene the relative power afforded to Cressida as possessor of the gaze is ever-shifting and unstable. Hodgson points out that the male objects of Cressida's gaze may easily become sources of "ridicule" and "laughter" in performance, "swaggering, self-important peacocks enacting cameo parodies of themselves."[303] Furthermore, as Cressida outwits Pandarus at every turn, ironizing and deflating the swelling rhetoric of his running commentary, her female gaze is "not only privileged" above her uncle's but also "given potential power and agency."[304]

The fact that Cressida's final appearance in act 5 scene 2 enacts a violent reversal of her first by rendering her the thoroughly powerless object of (onstage) male gazes has rightly been lamented by critics. On top of Diomedes's coercive sexual manipulation of Cressida, she is also unknowingly submitted throughout 5.2 to the stigmatizing patriarchal gazes of Ulysses and Troilus as, watching on, they intermittently narrate (and thereby construct) her supposed descent into whoredom. Nevertheless, as Hodgson suggests "the very heavy handedness of the frames in which [Cressida] is set also reveals the considerable anxiety that lies behind such misogyny" and "overdetermines the male gaze."[305] Moreover, the "male gaze" is itself multiple, wielded and experienced differently by Ulysses and Troilus in this scene, and must be further distinguished from the markedly queer gaze of Thersites, the fictional character who, spying on the other four characters, sits atop this spectatorial ladder and who in his position as the most knowing onstage spectator functions as an avatar for the paying playgoer. Thus I argue that despite its vicious misogyny this climactic episode ultimately only further intensifies the play's overarching destabilization of subject-object hierarchies of visual shame and visual pleasure.

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[302] *Troilus and Cressida* (Bevington), 176n.
[303] Hodgson, 269. Hodgson refers specifically to the Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Troilus and Cressida* directed by Terry Hands (Aldwych Theatre, London, July 27, 1981).
[304] Hodgson, 263. Gregory and Leonard similarly suggest that Cressida's undercutting of Pandarus's "language of epic grandeur" makes him "uncomfortable" by putting his "view of the pageant into doubt." Gregory and Leonard, 51.
[305] Hodgson, 273.

Consider Troilus's ambiguous status in this dense web of looks: both a powerful male subject shaming a powerless female object with his gaze *and* the humiliated and emasculated object of Ulysses's reproving, and Thersites's mocking, attentions. Like most of Shakespeare's onstage spectators Troilus is a compulsive interrupter who must constantly be reminded by Ulysses to "List!" (5.2.19) to the drama unfolding before them. Undeterred, the jealous Trojan only intensifies his performance of agonized spectatorship when he sees Cressida whisper in Diomedes's ear:

> TROILUS [*aside*] O plague and madness!
> ULYSSES [*to Troilus, aside*]
> You are moved, Prince. Let us depart, I pray you,
> Lest your displeasure should enlarge
> To wrathful terms. (5.2.37-40)

Observing that Troilus is violently "moved" by the spectacle of Cressida and Diomedes, Ulysses's suggestion that they cut their viewing short recalls Claudius shutting down *The Mousetrap* in a fit of visual "displeasure." Unlike Claudius, however, Troilus wants the show to go on ("Behold, I pray you" [5.2.42]), masochistically revelling in his role as man scorned. As he channels the histrionics of the early Elizabethan stage ranter ("O plague and madness!"), the theatricalization of Troilus's spectatorship is further underscored by the extent to which Ulysses *directs* Troilus's performance throughout the scene, providing the actor with verbal cues ("You have sworn patience," Ulysses tells Troilus at one point – before he has actually spoken [5.2.63]) while also guiding his physical gestures ("You shake, my lord, at something" [5.2.52]).

Moreover as the episode unfolds it becomes increasingly clear that Troilus is performing his spectatorship *for* Ulysses, catering his responses to the Cressida-Diomedes show according to the demands of his own newfound audience-of-one: "Fear me not, sweet lord," an obsequious Troilus implores as he assures Ulysses "I will not be myself, nor have cognition / Of what I feel. I am all patience" (5.2.64-66). Here spectating and acting are fully aligned as Troilus becomes "not" himself but instead "all patience" (precisely not what he professes to "feel"). Seconds later he hammers home the point again: "I will be patient; *outwardly* I will" (5.2.71; emphasis mine). Troilus's spectatorship thus emerges as a feat of self-negation: to watch the unfolding drama successfully (in order to please the person watching his watching) he must put on a different self. That Troilus fails miserably to actually *be* patient in no way undermines the performative basis of his spectatorship; rather, performing spectatorship paradoxically becomes a mode of self-expression for Troilus as he takes on the role of lover scorned.

Cressida – left alone (she thinks) to speak her final lines in the play – expresses more fully the idea that spectatorship is inextricable from selfhood: "Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee, / But with my heart the other eye doth see" (5.2.113-14). Cressida's experience of self-division is seemingly echoed after her exit by Troilus when he laments "This is and is not Cressid" (5.2.153). Unlike Troilus's formulation, however, Cressida's assertion emphasizes queer self-plurality ("I am multiple Cressidas") rather than self-negation ("I am *not* Cressida"). Both of the selves she inhabits at this moment – the Cressida who remains true to Troilus and the Cressida who loves Diomedes – are conflated with the organ of the gaze through the homophonic punning on "eye/I." For Cressida, to be an "I" means to be an "eye": spectatorship is constitutive of identity.

"Eye to eye opposed": theater's queer gaze

If selfhood is theatricalized throughout *Troilus and Cressida* – as characters are consistently presented as actor-spectator hybrids – the play imagines theater itself and the theatrical gaze as profoundly queer. The unstable looking relations mapped out in 1.2 and 5.2 typify the play's overall "queering of the gaze," a project defined by Kérchy as "one that unsettles such hierarchically organized binaries as spectator versus spectacle" and "subject versus object."[306] Such a queer unsettling of "power relations"[307] finds its ultimate characterological embodiment in Thersites. As aforementioned it is "rank Thersites" (1.3.73) – as opposed to the royal warriors Troilus or Ulysses – who is positioned atop the spectacular hierarchy in 5.2: he is both the onstage spectator with the most comprehensive view of the unfolding action *and* the onstage actor demanding the most attention from the play's paying spectators, undercutting the romantic denouement at regular intervals with his satirical asides before remaining alone onstage to speak the scene's final lines. Thersites comes to dominate the play's final act while his quasi-choric function positions his gaze as the primary onstage surrogate for the gazes of the paying playgoers. That Thersites "speaks nine of the play's fourteen soliloquies and over half his lines to the audience"[308] is indicative of his mediatory function which is often amplified in the many modern productions which assign him the prologue.[309] In Michael Macowan's influential 1938 staging of the play at London's Westminster Theatre Thersites delivered the prologue leaning against the proscenium arch, straddling the divide between the "fictional" and the "real" worlds.[310] Even after the historical erection of the fourth wall, then, Thersites continues to unsettle distinctions between stage and auditorium, actor and spectator: the quintessential boundary-crosser, Thersites inhabits a liminal – queer – theatrical space.

Thersites's queer in-betweenness is further underscored by his bastardy. Proudly self-identifying as a bastard, Thersites utters this supposed slur (and its derivatives) more than any other Shakespearean character. Upon meeting Priam's illegitimate son Margareton Thersites gleefully informs him that

> I am a bastard too; I love bastards. I am bastard begot, bastard instructed, bastard in mind, bastard in valour, *in everything illegitimate*. One bear will not bite another, and wherefore should one bastard? Take heed, the quarrel's most ominous to us. If the son of a whore fight for a whore, he tempts judgment. Farewell, bastard.
>
> (5.8.8-14; emphasis mine)

Like the queer, the bastard is mixed and impure, ultimately (un)defined by his or her cultural illegitimacy and illegibility.[311] Thersites's brazen bastardy thus functions as the

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[306] Kérchy, 67.

[307] Molly Moss defines a "queer gaze" as "one that unsettles power relations in many different ways." Molly Moss, "Thoughts on a queer gaze," *3:AM Magazine*, April 3, 2019, https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/thoughts-on-a-queer-gaze/.

[308] Ryan, 181.

[309] See Joanne Brown, "Reinterpreting *Troilus and Cressida*: Changing Perceptions in Literary Criticism and British Performance" (doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2016), 183.

[310] Roger Apfelbaum, *Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida": Textual Problems and Performance Solutions* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 144.

[311] Studies of queerness in early modern drama have generally overlooked the metaphorical resonances between queerness and bastardy, although Jennifer Higginbotham and Mark Johnston begin to touch on the link in their introduction to *Queering Childhood in Early Modern English Drama and Culture*. Jennifer Higginbotham and Mark Johnston, "Introduction," in *Queering Childhood in Early Modern English Drama and Culture*, ed. Higginbotham and Johnston (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 11. For an account of the

characterological equivalent of the queer generic identity of a "problem play" whose aggressive resistance to literary categorization has been a source of critical consternation for centuries.[312]

Tongue-in-cheek or not, Thersites's passionate call for a solidarity amongst bastards which traverses the Greek/Trojan divide imagines the illegitimate as a queer community comprised of individuals who resist normative national and familial affiliations. More explicitly queer is the theatrical community Thersites forms along with Achilles and Patroclus earlier in the play as the three Greeks stage a series of subversive re-enactments of the Trojan conflict in Achilles's tent-theater. Heaping homophobic insults on Patroclus throughout the play – variously branding him "Achilles' brach" (2.1.111),[313] "Achilles' male varlet," and "his masculine whore" (5.1.15-17) – Thersites is the only character unafraid to call the couple's relationship (however abusively) for what it is: the most "unquestionable allusion to a homosexual relationship in Shakespeare."[314]

Yet Achilles and Patroclus's "homosexual relationship" is better understood as "queer" in that it resists easy categorization (much like the play itself), refusing to be subsumed within the pederastic model for male-male sex with which the Greeks and Romans (if not quite the Elizabethans) were comfortable. Pederasty operates heteronormatively: "the axis of control merely shifts from the male-female polarity to the more Oedipal older male-younger male polarization, the older burdening the younger male with sexual objectification."[315] Certainly, as John Garrison shows, there is "*ambiguity*" surrounding the lovers' relative ages:[316] where Homer's Achilles is actually the younger of the pair, in Shakespeare's play Patroclus is called a "boy" by both Thersites (derogatively) and Achilles (in mourning).[317] Either way there is no obvious hierarchy in the relationship. Achilles may be *the* martial hero, but as Gregory Bredbeck points out Patroclus's death is announced "in an almost epic catalogue of heroes presented by Agamemnon" (5.5.6-14) as he comes to be "defined by a heroic idiom of war, blood, and death."[318] Patroclus also exerts considerable influence over his lover as the only person able to convince Achilles to resume fighting. While critics generally misread Achilles's return to the battlefield as a crazed response to his grief for Patroclus, as Garrison notes "Achilles decides to enter combat before Patroclus dies" as a result of his lover's private appeals ("To this effect,

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queerness of bastardy in a modern context, see Esther Saxey, "Lesbian Bastard Heroes: The Uses of Illegitimacy for Modern Lesbian Fiction and Identity," *Women: a cultural review* 16, no. 1 (2005), 33-51.

[312] Madhavi Menon suggests that "the very anti-category of 'problem play' qualifies Shakespeare to be the Queen of the Queers." Madhavi Menon, "Introduction," in *Shakequeer*, 20.

[313] An assessment with which an amused Achilles immediately concurs: "There's for you, Patroclus" (2.1.113).

[314] Stanley Wells, *Looking for Sex in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 88. Stephen Orgel likewise describes Achilles and Patroclus as an "overtly homosexual couple." Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 51. The question of whether or not there "really were" homosexuals in Shakespeare's England remains ferociously contested and beyond the scope of this chapter (for a foundational and extensive – if ultimately inconclusive – account see Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1982]). Suffice to say that if there were no homosexuals in the renaissance there were no heterosexuals either; if we are willing to treat, say, Romeo and Juliet's courtship as recognizably heterosexual, we should afford Achilles and Patroclus's homosexual bond the same courtesy.

[315] William Van Watson, "Shakespeare, Zeffirelli, and the Homosexual Gaze," in *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, ed. Deborah Barker and Ivo Kamps (London: Verso, 1995), 243.

[316] John Garrison, *Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 34; emphasis mine.

[317] At 5.1.14 and 5.5.47 respectively.

[318] Gregory Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 39.

Achilles, have I moved you" Patroclus begins, before repeating his call to action [3.3.218-27]).[319] Continued critical attempts to cast Patroclus as Achilles's possession ("*his* catamite, the 'boy' Patroclus"[320]) oversimplify a relationship which defies traditional heterosexist – and homosexist – matrices of power and control. With Achilles and Patroclus, it's never clear who is on top. Further complexifying (and queering) the dynamic between Achilles and Patroclus is the fact that unlike Shakespeare's Antonios in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice,* or Marlowe's Edward, the Greeks' male-male erotic bond is non-exclusive and does not preclude their sexual interest in female characters: Achilles speaks of his "fair love," the Trojan princess Polyxena (5.1.39), while Patroclus aggressively kisses Cressida twice upon her arrival at the Greek camp (4.5.30-34).

Nevertheless, Achilles and Patroclus spend most of the play together inside and outside Achilles's tent where they do two things: have sex and – along with Thersites – make theater. This provocative conflation of the antitheatricalists' most abhorred activities is first signalled when Ulysses informs the other generals that Achilles spends his truant days "in his tent" where he

> Lies mocking our designs. With him Patroclus,
> Upon a lazy bed, the livelong day
> Breaks scurril jests,
> And with ridiculous and awkward action –
> Which, slanderer, he imitation calls –
> He pageants us. Sometime, great Agamemnon,
> Thy topless deputation he puts on,
> And, like a strutting player, whose conceit
> Lies in his hamstring, and doth think it rich
> To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
> 'Twixt his stretched footing and the scaffoldage,
> Such to-be-pitied and o'erwrested seeming
> He acts thy greatness in; and when he speaks,
> 'Tis like a chime a-mending, with terms unsquared,
> Which from the tongue of roaring Typhon dropped
> Would seem hyperboles. At this fusty stuff
> The large Achilles, on his pressed bed lolling,
> From his deep chest laughs out a loud applause,
> Cries 'Excellent! 'Tis Agamemnon just.
> Now play me Nestor; hem; and stroke thy beard,
> As being dressed to some oration.' (1.3.145-66)

Here the theater has become not merely a place where men might meet other men for sex but the site of homosexual sex itself, the "lazy bed" upon which Achilles and Patroclus pass their days "pressed" by the weight of their fornicating bodies.[321] Unlike Thersites, Ulysses leaves the lovers' unnameable sin unspoken, with homosexual sex instead occupying the metrical void following "Breaks scurril jests" (and further implied via the sodomitical

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[319] Garrison, 37.

[320] Heather James, *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 104; emphasis mine.

[321] That a bed becomes "pressed" by the weight of sexual intercourse is later clarified during Pandarus's stage-managing of the rendezvous between Troilus and Cressida: "I will show you a chamber with a bed; which bed, because it shall not speak of your pretty encounters, press it to death" (3.2.202-4). Given Pandarus's approach to their "pretty encounters" as pleasurable spectacles throughout 3.2 and beyond, this heterosexual bed is also (albeit less explicitly) theatricalized.

connotations of "awkward action").[322] Ulysses himself – the spectator to Achilles and Patroclus's performance – possesses a homoeroticized theatrical gaze fascinated by and fixated on synecdoches of male beauty: the "hamstring" of the "strutting player"[323] and "large Achilles" with his "deep chest." True to the play's overarching conflation of spectating and acting Achilles – the putative spectator to Patroclus's performance – becomes the principal object of Ulysses's gaze and inserts himself into the stage action by offering his own impersonation of Nestor ("hem"). Similarly, Ulysses-the-spectator becomes Ulysses-the-actor as he reproduces (and expands upon) the words and gestures of Achilles and Patroclus for his audience of generals *elsewhere in the Greek camp*. The mimetic contagion so feared by antitheatricalists is thus realized as behaviours picked up in the theater spill out into the world beyond.

Just as early modern London's theaters enabled paying customers "to see, and to be seen, and not all to good ends," Patroclus and Achilles's tent-theater becomes the primary location for the Greeks (and eventually even the Trojans) to look at, and to be looked at by, their fellow warriors. I argue that throughout *Troilus and Cressida* this mutual gazing is established as foundational to both personal self-definition and interpersonal interaction. Achilles is desperate to be seen, parading himself "i'th'entrance of his tent" fully aware that his comrades are looking for him. Ulysses, however, has a plan to purge Achilles's "pride":

> Please it our general pass strangely by him,
> As if he were forgot; and, princes all,
> Lay negligent and loose regard upon him.
> I will come last. 'Tis like he'll question me
> Why such unplausive eyes are bent, why turned on him. (3.3.38-45)

Locking eyes with another is constitutive of Achilles's identity: he needs to be looked at directly (without "negligent" or "loose regard") and be recognized (hence Ulysses's instruction to treat him as a forgotten stranger). Ulysses repeats his theatricalizing conflation of looking and clapping ("unplausive eyes")[324] when confronted by Achilles, insisting

> That no man is the lord of anything
> …
> Till he communicate his parts to others;
> Nor doth he of himself known them for aught
> Till he behold them formed in th'applause
> Where they're extended. (3.3.116-21)

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[322] "The *OED*'s oldest and now obsolete meaning, 'turned the wrong way,' 'back foremost,' has the same potentially sodomitical suggestion as 'preposterous.'" *Troilus and Cressida* (Bevington), 190n. Consider Thersites branding Patroclus Achilles's "masculine whore" before cursing "such preposterous discoveries" (5.1.23). See also Patricia Parker, "Preposterous Events," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1992), 186-213.

[323] As Mario DiGangi explains "strong legs" were "the general standard of male beauty in the Renaissance." Focus on the hamstring demands that the "strutting player" be "seen from *behind* – a position from which he is subordinated and potentially eroticized. When perceived to be disorderly, the implicit eroticism of such positioning can be explicitly articulated as sodomy." Mario DiGangi, "Asses and Wits: The Homoerotics of Mastery in Satiric Comedy," *English Literary Renaissance* 25, no. 2 (1995), 200-201. Like early modern antitheatricalists, Ulysses simultaneously identifies playing as "disorderly" and casts himself as an agent of such disorder as the bearer of a sodomizing gaze. For an account of the antitheatrical tendency to make "the spectator the agent of theatre's chaotic power" see Robert Ormsby, "*Coriolanus*, Antitheatricalism, and Audience Response," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26, no. 1 (2008), 48.

[324] Although the Arden editor glosses "unplausive" as "disapproving" (*Troilus and Cressida* [Bevington], 268), the term (unique to this play) is clearly etymologically derived from the concept of applause – the sense thus being that Achilles is to be deprived of the (theatricalized) gazes of applauding adulation to which he is accustomed (and addicted).

In Ulysses's "philosophy of theatricalized value"[325] it is "man" in general whose identity is constituted via the experience of seeing others see him. But Achilles, prefiguring Cressida's "eye/I" punning, suggests that it is specifically the experience of a mutual gaze which underpins subjectivity-formation:

> The beauty that is borne here in the face
> The bearer knows not, but commends itself
> To others' eyes; nor doth the eye itself,
> That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself,
> Not going from itself, but eye to eye opposed
> Salutes each other with each other's form. (3.3.104-9)

Finding his own sense of self by looking in "others' eyes," Achilles imagines the ocular intercourse of the mutual gaze as simultaneously collaborative and combative: "eye to eye *opposed*."

Like Pandarus before them, the warriors' respective desires for and experiences of a mutual gaze are profoundly sexualized. Achilles plans

> T'invite the Trojan lords after the combat
> To see us here unarmed. I have a woman's longing,
> An appetite that I am sick withal,
> To see great Hector in his weeds of peace,
> To talk with him, and to behold his visage
> Even to my full of view. (3.3.238-43)

Achilles's "longing" to be seen seeing Hector – here analogized as the "sick" cravings of a pregnant woman – is much-discussed (for example, when Diomedes informs Hector that "great Achilles / Doth long to see" him "unarmed" [4.5.153-54]) but is only one among many such "loving interview[s]" (4.5.156) which take place outside his tent-theater. When Hector abruptly halts his single combat with Ajax because of their consanguinity, visual pleasure provokes physical contact between the pair:

> Let me embrace thee, Ajax.
> By him that thunders, thou hast lusty arms!
> Hector would have them fall upon him thus.
> Cousin, all honour to thee! [*They embrace*.] (4.5.136-39)

Excited by the sight of Ajax's muscular physique ("thou hast lusty arms!"), Hector initiates an apparently contagious orgy of embracing: Hector embraces Ajax twice (and then takes his hand), Agamemnon embraces Hector, Menelaus embraces Hector and Troilus, Hector embraces Nestor, Nestor embraces Hector back. Looking and touching are inextricably intertwined in a scene of seemingly compulsive mutual admiration which reaches its (anti)climax when Ulysses, wanting to show himself to Hector ("I beseech you next / To feast with me and see me at my tent"), provokes Achilles's competitive desire for Hector's gaze:

> ACHILLES
> I shall forestall thee, Lord Ulysses, thou!
> Now, Hector, I have fed mine eyes on thee;
> I have with exact view perused thee, Hector,
> And quoted joint by joint.
> HECTOR Is this Achilles?
> ACHILLES I am Achilles.
> HECTOR

[325] Paul Yachnin, "'The Perfection of Ten': Populuxe Art and Artisanal Value in *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2005), 324.

Stand fair, I pray thee. Let me look on thee.

ACHILLES

Behold thy fill.

HECTOR Nay, I have done already.

ACHILLES

Thou art too brief. I will the second time,
As I would buy thee, view thee limb by limb. (4.5.228-38)

Up until this moment Achilles has remained silent onstage, voyeuristically satisfying his quasi-cannibalistic craving for the spectacle of Hector in the flesh ("I have fed mine eyes on thee … joint by joint").[326] When their gaze becomes mutual the interaction is more explicitly sexualized as both men exchange come-hither invitation-commands before Hector, "too brief," disappoints Achilles with his ocular *ejaculatio praecox* ("I have done already").[327]

Presumably Hector means to establish himself on top by casting Achilles's body as unworthy of a lengthy gazing session but instead only encourages a "second," more violent ocular assault and finds himself imploring the Greek hero:

Why dost thou so oppress me with thine eye?

ACHILLES

Tell me, you heavens, in which part of his body
Shall I destroy him? Whether there, or there, or there? (4.5.241-43)

In the seventeenth century "oppress" could function synonymously with "rape" or "violate."[328] Responding to Hector's accusation, Achilles effectively wonders "in which part of his body / Shall I *penetrate* him?", perhaps even touching Hector ("there, or there, or there") as he commits his ocular rape. The metaphorization of the eye as a sexual organ was widespread amongst early moderners but was thoroughly confused, for the period had inherited two competing theories of vision from the ancient world. Proponents of "extramission" cast the eye as an active, penetrating member, beaming forth its spirits into the surrounding environment. As Thijs Weststeijn explains, if these spirits encountered a human object they might "penetrate it through its weakest point, the eyes," thereby committing an act of "ocular assault."[329] Proponents of "intromission" conversely viewed the eye as a purely passive, penetrable organ, receiving beams of light from the outside world. Joseph Lenz notes that this is why

> Drawings of the eye made by Roger Bacon, in the thirteenth century, and by Vesalius, the Belgian anatomist in the sixteenth, resemble drawings of the female sexual organs: images enter through the pupil and are channelled through the optic nerve into the brain, where, in Richard II's words, they "people this little world." The eyes are a channel, a vagina, if you will, the means through which the mind is impregnated with "all evilnesse and mischiefe."[330]

Unlike genital organs early modern eyes are finally neither fully male nor fully female, neither penetrator nor penetrated. Hence the potential inherent in early modern ocular

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[326] For Patricia Parker Achilles's appraisal of Hector resembles a "butcher's assessment" of his meat. Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare From the Margins* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 109.

[327] Bruce Smith suggests that Achilles enacts "a violent parody of a lover's blazon." Bruce Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 61.

[328] "oppress, v." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/132001 (accessed 10 May 2023).

[329] Weststeijn, 155.

[330] Lenz, 841. Along with Shakespeare's Richard, Lenz quotes the antitheatricalist John Northbrooke's fear of the "evilnesse and mischiefe" assaulting the eyes in playhouses.

intercourse – as in the mutual staring session between Achilles and Hector – for the roles of top and bottom to become queerly shifting and unstable. The sexual intercourse of eyes ultimately engenders queer (con)fusion – "eye-beams twisted," as John Donne puts it, "upon one double string."[331]

"Do you know a man if you see him?": theater's social network

I have argued that in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare enacts a thorough erasure of the actor/spectator binary. This in turn begs reconsideration of just how *visible* early modern theatergoers were, both to the performers onstage and to one another. Although Shakespearean metatheater is generally understood as a distancing device which foregrounds "the artificiality of the dramatic event, placing a barrier between action and audience,"[332] I argue that the assumed existence of such a fiction/reality divide – two distinct "planes" which are "separate, and separable, in the theater"[333] – falls apart when faced with *Troilus and Cressida*. Instead, the function of the play's incessant reminders to its spectators that they are in a theater watching a show is not to erect a "barrier" between the spectators and the show but conversely to bring the spectators *into the show*. Early modern plays were written for theaters in which actors and spectators locked eyes and were staged in a theatrical environment characterized by fluidity and mobility, not yet committed to our own post-proscenium arch reductive binaries distinguishing between stage and auditorium, actor and spectator, fiction and reality.

Early modern playgoers were thus essentially actor-spectators producing dramatic action in tandem – or in competition – with professional players. Neil Powell suggests that *Troilus and Cressida*'s relentless metatheatricality produces such a sense of "complicity" between player and playgoer – "*Troilus* is a play within a play … the audience supplies, and is, the outer play."[334] But rather than inner play versus "outer play," I contend that it is *all one play* – or, more precisely, *many* plays unfolding within the theater's walls for the duration of the theatrical event. Although critics increasingly recognize the extent to which early modern players staged their entertainments "processively, collaboratively, and even in concert with the playgoers,"[335] as Shakespeare reveals in *Troilus and Cressida* such theatrical experiences were also characterized by *competition* between individual participants: in scene after scene throughout the play, the erasure of the actor/spectator boundary ensures that the position of central object of attention is ever-shifting and unstable, constantly up for grabs. When Thersites briefly occupies the stage of the tent-theater and promises his audience "You shall see the pageant of Ajax," his show's putative spectator Achilles promptly interrupts and speaks more than double the number of words spoken by either of the actors (Thersites and Patroclus) in the ensuing "pageant" (3.3.271-300). Theatrical focus and attention are thoroughly fractured and divided.

So, too, in the amphitheaters in which plays like *Troilus and Cressida* were staged. John Webster's description of *An excellent Actor* (1615) has often been taken as paradigmatic of the workings of early modern theatrical attention:

> Whatsoever is commendable in the grave Orator, is most exquisitly perfect in [the actor]; for by a full and significant action of body, he charmes our attention: sit in a

[331] John Donne, "The Ecstasy," in *John Donne: The Complete English Poems,* ed. A.J. Smith (London: Penguin, 1971), 53.
[332] Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare's History* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985), 137.
[333] Stephen Purcell, "Are Shakespeare's plays always metatheatrical?", *Shakespeare Bulletin* 38, no. 1 (2018), 26.
[334] Neil Powell, "Hero and human: the problem of Achilles," *Critical Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1979), 27-8.
[335] Yachnin, 311.

> full Theater, and you will think you see so many lines drawne from the circumference of so many eares, whiles the *Actor* is the *Center*.[336]

Understandably Webster – a playwright – imagines spectators' "eares" attentively focused on the play text's words,[337] but while such an attentional dynamic may often prevail in our own modern, quasi-devotional theatergoing culture, in an early modern context his depiction of *An excellent Actor*'s magical spell is pure fantasy. Onstage actors undoubtedly got a lot of attention, but they had to compete with paying playgoers from whom, antitheatricalist Stephen Gosson claims, there is

> suche heauing, and shoouing, suche ytching and shouldring, too sitte by women … Such ticking, such toying, such smiling, such winking, and such manning them home, when the sportes are ended, that it is a right Comedie, to marke their behauiour, to watche their conceites, as the Catte for the Mouse.[338]

For Gosson the offstage action – "a right Comedie" – is as much a play as that unfolding onstage, and equally worthy of attention. Fellow theater-hater Anthony Munday describes a more intentional usurpation of theatrical focus by spectators seeking to become "an obiect to al mens eies" with "young ruffins" and "harlots, vtterlie past al shame: who *presse* to the fore-frount of the scaffoldes, *to the end to showe their impudencie*" and "commit that filthines openlie which is horrible to be done in secret."[339] While some playgoers no doubt compliantly collaborated with the professional players, piecing out their imperfect words with their own thoughts, others competed with the stage "for control of the other spectators' attention."[340]

Just as spectators made a spectacle of themselves as they watched one another watching (or not watching) the drama onstage so too were they an object of focus for professional actors and playwrights seeking to determine the success of their entertainments. Stern has shown how it was common practice at play premieres for the playwright to be "present – and hidden … in the tiring house" from where he could spectate the spectators and gauge their "opinion" of his work. In a further blurring of theatrical roles, the playwright might morph into an actor. Ben Jonson – who like Shakespeare began his career as an actor – was later "famous for going out onto the stage when his play had finished" in order to banter with the crowd.[341] In *Troilus and Cressida* Ulysses similarly (con)fuses the roles of playwright, spectator, and actor as he orchestrates, spectates, and participates in pivotal interactions between other characters from the parade of "unplausive eyes" past Achilles to the humiliation of the lovers in 5.2. When he makes his appearance before Achilles's tent-theater Ulysses even uses a prop to underscore his supposed disinterestedness. Lingering onstage after the other warriors depart Ulysses's ostentatious perusal of a book provokes an attention-starved Achilles to ask, "What are you reading?" (3.3.95). Here Shakespeare glances at a practice common amongst Elizabethan playgoers who, like Ulysses, sought inventive ways of gaining notice from their fellow actor-

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[336] John Webster, *The Complete Works*, ed. F.L. Lucas, vol. 4 (New York: Gordian, 1966), 42.

[337] Although it has become commonplace to assert that early moderners conceived of theater in primarily aural terms Gabriel Egan has shown that throughout the period references to "seeing" a play outnumber "hearing" by more than 12 to 1. Gabriel Egan, "Hearing or Seeing a Play?: Evidence of Early Modern Theatrical Terminology," *Ben Jonson Journal* 8 (2001), 327–47. Building on Egan's findings Evelyn Tribble suggests that "In the sensory ecology of the early modern stage, sight held [the] predominant place." Evelyn Tribble, "Sight and spectacle," in *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, ed. Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 240.

[338] Gosson, *The School of Abuse*, 17v.

[339] Munday, G3r-G3v.

[340] Ormsby, 50.

[341] Tiffany Stern, "'A Small-Beer Health to His Second Day': Playwrights, Prologues, and First Performances in the Early Modern Theater," *Studies in Philology* 101, no. 2 (2004), 187.

spectators. Stern explains that literate spectators would bring books to the theater and try, "by reciting and analyzing the texts in their hands, to draw attention to themselves, highlight their choice of literature and broadcast their critical talents."[342] Ulysses's book-reading is commensurate with his personality according to a long literary traditional casting him as sly and cerebral; some of Shakespeare's contemporaries similarly took books to the theater in order to fashion their own public personae.

Rather than "a far-sighted burlesque of celebrity culture"[343] by the ever-prophetic Shakespeare, then, I argue instead that *Troilus and Cressida*'s long-noted obsession with fame and recognition reflects the commercial theater's function as an early modern equivalent of a social network. Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright trace a fascinating genealogy from Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* – a painting which demonstrates how "the gaze can be distributed across different subject positions and can oscillate, following different lines of sight" – to the complex and unstable webs of regard comprising online communities like Facebook or Instagram. Such social media prioritize visual exchange – the selfie being their primary currency – and serve a dual purpose: on the one hand individual self-display and self-promotion, on the other hand community formation and regulation.[344] I argue that early modern London's habitual playgoers were engaging in similar look(s)-based social networking practices whenever they went to the theater. As Woods notes playgoers certainly "recognized the well-known faces of players such as Tarlton but they also recognized one another's faces,"[345] as in an epigram whose speaker experiences this moment of recognition while attending the playhouse: "Is she that Marchants wife? I know that face, / And sure haue seene it, in some other place."[346] Playgoers were recognizable to one another *as playgoers*, forging bonds of recognition and complicity both within the theater's walls *and* upon encounter "in some other place." Much like twenty-first century social networking, while "facial interactivity"[347] in early modern theaters was necessarily collaborative it was also competitive, with some playgoers striving to get more exposure than others.

Like early modern playgoers, Shakespeare's characters are persistently engaged in practices of visual recognition and differentiation. I argue that *Troilus and Cressida*'s thorough theatricalization of selfhood creates a world in which – as in the playhouse – individual identity and social interaction are based on looks and looking.[348] From Pandarus's play-defining question, "Do you know a man if you see him?", to Ulysses recognizing Diomedes because he "ken[s] the manner of his gait" ("He rises on the toe") (4.5.15-16), *Troilus and Cressida* is dominated by a compulsive impulse to ascribe individual identity via physical distinctiveness. When Hector, for example, arrives outside Achilles's tent-theater he relishes the opportunity to play a homosexualized game of *Where's Waldo?* with Aeneas (the kind of game that some of Shakespeare's customers played at the Globe): "The worthiest of [the Greeks] tell me name by name; / But for Achilles, mine own searching eyes / Shall find him by his large and portly size" (4.5.161-

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[342] Tiffany Stern, "Watching as Reading: The Audience and Written Text in Shakespeare's Playhouse," in *How to Do Things with Shakespeare*, ed. Laurie Maguire (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 138.
[343] Ryan, 177.
[344] Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 108.
[345] Woods, 143.
[346] Richard West, *VVits A.B.C. or A centurie of epigrams* (London, 1608), B4r.
[347] Woods, 142.
[348] This look(s)-based social world is thus distinct from early modern society more broadly, in which individuals were arranged hierarchically according to their class.

3). For many of the play's characters – as for early modern theatergoers – all of this "wincking and glauncing of wanton eyes" is *fun*.

Of course, in a look(s)-based social world individuals are relentlessly objectified and commodified: everyone in *Troilus and Cressida* is ascribed a quantifiable value and price. Curiously, however, the play's chief symbol for this objectification of people is the *book*. By repeatedly commodifying – and sexualizing – the printed word Shakespeare ultimately undoes (in advance) a Never Writer's quasi-puritanical insistence upon the page/stage hierarchy.[349] Consider Ulysses branding Cressida a prostitute when she refuses to kiss him as she has the other warriors (under duress) upon arriving at the Greek camp:

> There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
> Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
> At every joint and motive of her body.
> O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
> That give accosting welcome ere it comes,
> And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
> To every tickling reader! Set them down
> For sluttish spoils of opportunity
> And daughters of the game. (4.5.56-64)

Collapsing the image/text binary Ulysses first imagines Cressida's gaze as a sexually solicitous speaking eye – a kind of face-book – before, Argus-like, "every" part of her "body" starts to "look out" invitingly. The following image, "blatantly sexual," figures "loose women as books spreading themselves suggestively before the gaze of fascinated men."[350] Such imagery is not only used in the play to describe "loose women": later in the same scene Hector also imagines himself as an eroticized "book of sport" being read "o'er" by Achilles's thirsty gaze (4.5.239). Shakespeare's sexualization of the book in *Troilus and Cressida* thus troubles the claim, commonly prefacing printed editions of early modern plays, that there is "something virginal about an unacted play."[351] Precisely the same antitheatrical bias underpins a Never Writer's fetishizing of the book as a pure space protecting Shakespeare's text from the degrading "clapper-clawing" of the "vulgar" and from "being sullied with the smoky breath of the multitude."[352]

The fundamental obstacle to a Never Writer's aversion to "clapper-clawing" is that without it early modern London's theaters – and all of the plays written for them, including Shakespeare's – would never have existed. A Never Writer uses this unusual phrase to refer to the rowdy applause (clapping) of the "vulgar," borrowing it from Thersites in act 5 as his excitement builds for the climactic combat scenes: "Now they are clapper-clawing one another. I'll go look on." The play's Arden editor distinguishes Shakespeare's use of "clapper-clawing" from a Never Writer's, glossing Thersites's line according to the *OED* definition: "clawing, scratching, mauling, thrashing."[353] However, considering the ensuing action that Thersites "look[s] on" his use of this multi-layered phrase similarly connotes a

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[349] As we have seen, Ulysses's use of a book as a prop in his play-acting for Achilles also works to theatricalize the printed word.

[350] *Troilus and Cressida* (Bevington), 313.

[351] Lenz, 847. Similarly a pirated edition released without an author's consent might be viewed as a virgin violated, as in the letter to the reader prefacing *Gorboduc* which lambasts "one W.G." for having previously "put [the play] forth excedingly corrupted: euen as if by meanes of a broker for hire, he should haue entised into his house a faire maide and done her villainie, and after all to bescratched her face, torne her apparell, berayed and disfigured her, and then thrust her out of dores dishonested." Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, *The Tragidie of Ferrex and Porrex* (London, 1570), A2r

[352] *Troilus and Cressida* (Bevington), 145-46.

[353] *Troilus and Cressida* (Bevington), 359.

sense of pleasurably violent theatricalized applause. As throughout the rest of the play, when the Greeks and the Trojans finally come to blows their encounters (physical violence notwithstanding) consist primarily of aggressive gazing, mutual visual appreciation, and competitive ploys for attention.[354] With its theatricalized, quasi-masturbatory conflation of looking, applauding, and touching other bodies, "clapper-clawing one another" is both the principal activity performed by Shakespeare's warriors and precisely what early modern Londoners were doing when they went to the theater.

The fact that playgoers *paid* for such pleasures (and that players were paid for providing them) is why ultimately *Troilus and Cressida* directly addresses its customers (via Pandarus's Epilogue) as fellow "traders in the flesh" (5.11.45). Critics generally view Pandarus's Epilogue as unique for "offending rather than entreating" Shakespeare's audience,[355] or for lacking the playwright's characteristic "unifying" closing gestures of "inclusiveness";[356] modern theater directors betray a similar anxiety by regularly moving the speech to earlier in the play or excising it altogether.[357] Yet Pandarus's gleefully conspiratorial turn to his fellow "Good traders in the flesh" and "Brethren and sisters of the hold-door trade" (5.11.45-51) is powerful precisely because of its "inclusiveness," "unifying" *everyone* in the theater engaged in the trafficking of their looks and bodies. Pandarus's tone is affectionately matter-of-fact, even celebratory; neither Pandarus nor the play has any "intention of chastising vice," *pace* one particularly homophobic reading from the 1970s.[358] Shakespeare (unlike Jonson) was far too savvy and successful a businessman to attempt to reform the vices of his customers. *Troilus and Cressida* instead re-enacts and encourages playgoers to participate in the myriad illicit pleasures and "lascivious meetings"[359] facilitated by attendance at London's commercial theaters – which were, after all, generally situated next to brothels and attended by prostitutes and their clients alike.[360]

The play's emphasis on the theater's function as a cruising ground for sex is coupled with incessant references to sexually transmitted disease. The closing couplet sees Pandarus promising to meet the playgoers again: "Till then I'll sweat and seek about for eases, / And at that time bequeath you my diseases" (5.11.55-56). From a modern perspective Pandarus's offer may well be "unpleasant," his STDs "nothing anyone wants to participate in or commiserate with."[361] But as the frequency of pox jokes in extant plays from the period implies, for a sexually active early modern theatergoer Pandarus's "diseases" were simply, if regrettably, a fact of daily life. Tracing the metaphorical impact of this social reality, Jonathan Gil Harris suggests that for "an age in which venereal disease had irrevocably transformed attitudes towards desire and its physical consequences, to 'affect' is to 'infect.'"[362] Shakespeare's customers may not have *wanted* to contract

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[354] See 5.7, an eight-line scene existing solely for Achilles to demand that his Myrmidons "Mark" him, "Attend" him, "Follow" him, and his "proceedings eye" (5.7.1-7).
[355] Hodgson, 285.
[356] Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 232.
[357] See Brown, 183.
[358] Rolf Lessenich, "Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*: The Vision of Decadence," *Studia Neophilologica* 49, no. 2 (1977), 230. Like early modern antitheatricalists Lessenich is especially fascinated by "perversion" – above all the play's "despicable" and "disgusting" displays of "homosexual inertia" (228).
[359] Thomas Middleton, *No wit, [no] help like a womans* (London, 1657), A2r.
[360] See Lenz, 837. Lenz offers a comprehensive overview of how the theater was itself conceived by some early moderners as "a brothel, a pander, a whore, a way toward debauchery and a site for it" (833).
[361] Byville, 607.
[362] Jonathan Gil Harris, "'The Enterprise is Sick': Pathologies of Value and Transnationality in *Troilus and Cressida*," *Renaissance Drama* 29 (1998), 15. Johannes Fabricius argues that Shakespeare's increased reference to syphilis in *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Cressida* suggests the playwright himself contracted the

Pandarus's "diseases," but some might certainly have "commiserated" with him, or continued "to participate in" risky sexual encounters.

As we have seen *Troilus and Cressida*'s primary analogue for the theater – Achilles's tent – is also the site of male-male sex. Antitheatricalists likewise insisted that theaters were cruising-grounds where "*Sodomits*" found like-minded "mates," while the period's satirical writings were populated by figures like Edward Guilpin's "fine fellow" who attends "euery play, and euery night / Sups with his *Ingles*."[363] Theater's perceived popularity amongst homosexual men was firmly established in early modern England. Given the unusually heightened visibility of explicitly homosexual desire in *Troilus and Cressida* and the play's evocation of a queer theatrical gaze it is fitting that its final solicitation is delivered by Pandarus, "the very emblem of the space *between*."[364] Beyond pimping out his niece Pandarus's in-betweenness (like Thersites's) stems from his transgressing and ultimately erasing any boundary between stage and auditorium, fiction and reality. How else could he hope to transmit his diseases to the other actor-spectators assembled in the theater?

Of course, the people who paid for plays in early modern London sought satisfaction of a variety of needs and desires: for some the theater was a space for self-display, for fashioning a public persona within the theatrical social network; others went to the playhouse cruising for sex. In *Troilus and Cressida* what happens in the theater refuses to stay in the theater, from Ulysses reperforming the impersonations staged in Achilles's tent to Thersites eventually taking his satirical performances (initially confined to the tent) all over the Greek camp. Shakespeare's customers likewise took the playhouse with them when they left it newly enmeshed in bonds of recognition with their fellow playgoers (or by taking a "mate" home to "plaie the *Sodomits*"). Above all *Troilus and Cressida* foregrounds the *queerness* of the early modern theatrical gaze, a gaze constituted by a dense web of looks whose bearers continually shifted between – and thus dismantled – polar positions like subject/object, looker/looked-at, male/female, and fictional/real. Little wonder then that the elitist Never Writer – clearly a fan of Shakespeare's *writing* – sought to disassociate the Bard from such theatrical dissolution and disorder. Like Pandarus's hard-won diseases the theater was exciting but also potentially dangerous, both to individuals (theft, violence, plague) and to Elizabethan Society writ large (by undermining the very notion of stable identities and hierarchies). Hence the subsequent, post-proscenium arch erection of theater's prophylactic fourth wall – the theatrical equivalent of the condom invented to prevent the spread of Pandarus's diseases. Safe sex. Safe theater.

Looking ahead

Troilus and Cressida explores how theaters functioned as spaces in which actors and spectators alike – perhaps better thought of collectively as actor-spectators, given the ever-shifting instability of these positions – could engage in a 'publishing' of their own (or another's) identity and work to build an early modern social network, forging bonds of recognition and attraction not only transgressing the line between stage and auditorium but also extending (just as the antitheatricalists feared) far beyond the walls of the theater itself, into the outside world. Such transgressions were only possible in a theater, like the one I uncover in this dissertation, that operated without the protective membrane of the fourth

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disease during a mid-life crisis. Johannes Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare's England* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1994), 231-4.

[363] Guilpin, B1v.

[364] Patricia Parker, *Margins*, 226.

wall that separates actors from spectators, illusion from reality. The immersive and inclusive experience of early modern theatergoing – an experience that depended on actors and spectators locking eyes, being mutually visible – fundamentally changed after the arrival of the proscenium arch in Restoration theaters. Of course, no historical shift is absolute. As Nova Myhill points out, while "the closing of the theatres between 1642 and 1660 is quite justifiably treated as marking an epochal division in the history of theatre in England," the arch didn't immediately "remove significant portions of the audience from their position behind the forestage, and it certainly did not make the Restoration theatre less a place to see and be seen than its Caroline predecessors."[365] Nevertheless, the advent of the proscenium arch marked a crucial turning point in the increasing *separation* between the stage and the auditorium, players and playgoers. When theaters later went dark, spectators were even separated from each other (as, eventually, in Mulvey's cinema).

Looking ahead, I would like to explore the philosophical and sociological implications of this increasing separation. Rather than approach the proscenium arch as a purely technological 'advance,' linked to the introduction of perspective scenery, I want to consider the possibility that the arch (and its corresponding fourth wall) was a response to the profound *openness* of the early modern stage. As I have shown in this dissertation, early modern antitheatricalists viewed the openness of the theater – and the interactions that such openness facilitated between actors and spectators throughout the auditorium (and beyond) – as disruptive and sodomitical. Would they have preferred post-proscenium arch theater, increasingly compartmentalized and atomized? Peter Womack outlines another major historical shift in the conceptualization of theatrical space – and one surely linked to the coming down of the fourth wall:

> At the Swan or the Globe, the house is covered and the stage is literally open to the sky; although the stage is capable of representing exterior and interior locations indifferently, the normal term for "offstage" is "within." This shared structure implies a striking distinction between the Renaissance stage and modern realism. In the latter, the natural dramatic location is a room: that is the alias that best covers the enclosed character of the actual theatrical space, and the offstage world is a kind of outside, threatening or inviting. The Renaissance stage, on the other hand, is outside. When you exit you go in.[366]

Although, as Womack concedes, renaissance plays are replete with scenes that are fictionally set indoors, the point is that the stage itself is conceived of as a public, *open*, space. "It is," Womack continues, "a highly social conception of drama; the action takes place not in private space, but in the communal space where privacies encounter one another."[367] We are beginning to trace a historical trajectory, then, that involves not only an increasing separation between the stage and the auditorium, illusion and reality, but also an increasing *privatization* of the stage itself. The erotic charge and queer potential of the mutual gazing facilitated by the openness of the early modern theater is short-circuited: for now, spectators look into (and are, at least theoretically, invisible to) a playing space conceived of as private. What might a study of these theatrical paradigm shifts – the advent of the proscenium arch, going from an open to a closed stage – add to histories of the regulation, stratification, and privatization of sexuality?

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[365] Nova Myhill, "Making Spectacles: Spectatorship and Authority on the Early Modern Stage," in *Early Modern Spectatorship: Interpreting English Culture 1500-1780,* ed. Ronald Huebert and David McNeil (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 21.
[366] Peter Womack, "The Comical Scene: Perspective and Civility on the Renaissance Stage," *Representations* 101.1 (2008), 43.
[367] Ibid.

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