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## Playbooks

Almost from the introduction of the printing press into England, stationers printed drama alongside their religious treatises, sermons, legal manuals, medical texts, poetry, and other kinds of books. From the series of six Latin plays by Terence that Richard Pynson printed between 1494 and 1497; to the first surviving English playbook, John Rastell's edition of Henry Medwall's *1 & 2 Fulgens and Lucrece* (c.1512); through the closet tragicomedy on *Crafty Cromwell* (1648), the closet tragedy on *Charles the First* (1649), and the numerous other plays printed during the Interregnum, printed drama formed an important segment of the book trade.<sup>1</sup>

Before the opening of the permanent theaters in London, stationers published a wide variety of nonprofessional drama: classical plays, both in the original and in translation; morality plays like *Everyman* (Pynson, c.1515) and other types of religious drama, such as John Bale's staunchly Protestant plays printed in the late 1540s; comic "interludes" like those by John Heywood, whose plays were performed at the court of Henry VIII, or Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* (Thomas Hacket?, 1566), perhaps first performed by the students at the Westminster grammar school Udall ran; drama associated with the city guilds, like John Skelton's *Magnificence* (Rastell, 1533), which probably debuted in the Merchant Tailors' Hall; classically inspired tragedies like *Gorboduc* (William Griffith, 1565), written by the Inns of

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<sup>1</sup> Note that Pynson's editions of Terence are not included in W. W. Greg's *A Bibliography of English Printed Drama to the Restoration* (4 vols., London: Bibliographical Society, 1939-59); Greg's rationale of inclusion and exclusion for Latin drama was not particularly helpful, and so his bibliography is considerably less comprehensive with Latin than with English-language plays.

Court men Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville; and adaptations of classical comedy like the anonymous *Jack Juggler* (William Copland, c.1562), “Englished” from Plautus’s *Amphitruo* and perhaps associated with a grammar school.

The material form of these early playbooks derived from a combination of English and classical traditions. Most of the early dramatists were university educated men who had been taught their Latin by reading (and performing) Terence, Plautus, and Seneca, and so it is not surprising that printed editions of their work reflect many of the classical conventions they presumably used when writing their plays in manuscript. Latin drama typically included act and scene divisions, speech prefixes abbreviated to one or two letters, and a typographical practice known as “continuous printing,” in which verse lines broken between two speakers are set on one line of text with a speech prefix in the middle of the line, a practice that emphasizes the verbal poetics of the play over its enacted performance.<sup>2</sup> But the native tradition deriving from manuscripts of morality and guild drama contributed important elements to the appearance of printed plays as well, including descriptive stage directions and notations of entrances and exits; early printed playbooks also often reject continuous printing in favor of the increased legibility of setting each new speaker on a new line. And all these playbooks were printed in black letter, the usual typeface for vernacular texts in the sixteenth century and a signifier of “Englishness.” The ideological weight carried by black letter can be seen immediately in the translation of Terence’s *Andria* printed around 1520, which uses roman typeface for the Latin text printed in the margins (presumably so that students could hone their skills) and black letter for the English translation (Fig. 1). Printers chose black letter, in part, to distinguish these playbooks from

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<sup>2</sup> See T.H. Howard-Hill, “The Evolution of the Form of Plays in English during the Renaissance,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990): 112-45; and Carol Symes, “The Appearance of Early Vernacular Plays: Forms, Functions, and the Future of Medieval Theater,” *Speculum* 77 (2002): 778-831. On continuous printing, see Zachary Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 52-80.

classical drama and thereby appeal to the broadest possible market of readers rather than only those interested in and able to read classically inspired plays.<sup>3</sup>

Early stationers used all the marketing tools at their disposal to convince customers to buy their playbooks. Rastell's edition of *Fulgens and Lucrece* attempts to catch the book-buyer's eye with a title-page illustration, a marketing device used periodically throughout the period, including in the famous woodcut of Doctor Faustus added on the fourth edition of Marlowe's bestseller (Fig. 2). But woodcuts and engravings cost money, cutting into a publisher's profits, which may explain why they weren't used more often, appearing on only about one in ten playbook title pages. Textual title-page advertisements were cheaper. Perhaps the most important marketing feature of early interludes, and one that rapidly disappeared once the permanent professional theater became established, is the (sometimes quite detailed) claim about how to perform the play. The title page of *Fulgens and Lucrece* notes simply that it is "deyded in two p[er]tyes / to be played at ii. tymes," but later playbooks give more elaborate specifications. Rastell's title page for his own *Nature of the Four Elements* (1520?) tells readers how long to allot for a performance, and how to abridge if necessary: "yf y<sup>e</sup> hole matter be playd [it] wyl conteyne the space of an hour and a halfe / but yf ye lyst ye may leue out mucche of the sad mater as the messengers perte / and some of naturys parte and some of experyens perte & yet the matter wyl depend conueniently / and than it wyll not be paste thre quarters of an hour of length."<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Udall's *Jacob and Esau* (Henry Bynneman, 1568) gives advice on costuming, listing "the partes and names of the Players who are to be consydered to be Hebrews and so should be apparailed with attire."

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<sup>3</sup> See Zachary Lesser, "Typographic Nostalgia: Play-Reading, Popularity, and the Meanings of Black Letter," in Marta Straznicky, ed., *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2006), 99-126.

<sup>4</sup> See Greg Walker, *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 6-50. I have found Walker's work extremely helpful throughout this section.

The performance information most stressed on these early title pages is the small cast they require. R. Wever's *Lusty Juventus* (Abraham Veale, c.1550) claims that "Foure may play it easely, takyng such partes as they thinke best: so that any one tak of those partes that be not in place at once." Far more detailed information about casting and doubling was offered on the title page of John Alde's edition of Thomas Preston's *Cambises* (1570?): readers of this play are shown precisely how it may be performed by eight men, some doubling in as many as seven roles (Fig. 3). Clearly stationers believed that a major part of the audience for playbooks consisted of actors themselves, whether the household players of some great lord (who might be able to procure the "Hebrew" costumes required by *Jacob and Esau*), a more humble touring company (who might find attractive the very small number of players needed for *Lusty Juventus*), or others who might want to put on a "do-it-yourself" production.

When early modern stationers first decided there was a market for printed plays, then, they seem largely to have understood the playbook as a script for future performance. Of course, they must have sold some proportion of their print runs to those who merely wanted to read the play. A large number of the earliest playbooks, for example, were a sort of humanist family affair, associated with the stationers John and William Rastell (brother-in-law and nephew of Thomas More, and printers of his English works), and the authors Henry Medwall and John Heywood (who married John Rastell's daughter). The Rastells seem to have been trying to emulate, in the vernacular, the Continental humanist printing houses that published classical drama; they may therefore have always imagined the play as a printed text as well as a performance.<sup>5</sup> And other title pages show that publishers were appealing to play readers as well as performers: Lewis Wager's *The Life and Repentance of Mary Magdalene* (John Charlewood,

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<sup>5</sup> On the Rastell circle, see Sonia Massai's fascinating first chapter in her forthcoming *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge UP).

1566), for instance, claims to be “very delectable for those which shall heare *or reade* the same.”<sup>6</sup>

Some early playbooks offer themselves as records of a particular past performance, a kind of transitional stage between the play-it-yourself appeal that dominates these title pages and the later playbooks deriving from the professional stage. *Gorboduc* and Richard Edwards’s *Damon and Pithias* (Richard Jones, 1571) both tout their performance before the Queen, giving ordinary readers a chance to peer into the lives and entertainments of the wealthy and noble.<sup>7</sup> The title page of *Damon and Pithias* is particularly interesting, announcing that the play is “Newly imprinted, as the same was shewed before the Queenes Maiestie, by the Children of her Graces Chappell, except the prologue that is somewhat altered for the proper vse of them that hereafter shall haue occasion to plaie it, either in priuate, or open audience.” Is this playbook best understood as a script for future performance, a record of past performance, or both? Playbooks always served numerous functions for their readers, but while home performance never disappeared as a reason for buying a play (as shown by Edward Dering’s purchases of multiple copies of single plays in the 1620s), the rise of the professional theater in London caused publishers to shift from marketing playbooks “for the proper use of them that hereafter shall have occasion to play it” to marketing them “as the same was shewed” by a particular professional company at a particular theatrical venue. We should not imagine any neat transition, but it does seem that playbook buyers were becoming constituted more firmly as the play’s *readers*, rather than as potential actors or spectators—just as the professionalization of the London theater helped not only to transform actors into more formal “companies” but also to turn the people who had occasionally watched a dramatic performance into a theatrical “audience.”

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<sup>6</sup> Emphasis added; see Walker, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Walker, 29.

These early editions certainly helped to pave the way for the printing of professional drama after 1576, but the emergence into print of the plays of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, and their contemporaries was by no means inevitable. While stationers had been printing plays for eighty years when the Theatre opened in Shoreditch, Londoners going to Paul's Churchyard in the early 1590s might well have been surprised to find a play from the professional theaters among their choices.<sup>8</sup> Such book-buyers might never have expected to be able to buy a copy of the play they had recently enjoyed onstage, because by the end of 1593, only twenty professional plays had found their way into print in the eighteen years since the opening of the Theatre. In half of those years, not a single professional play had been printed. The commercial theater had been thriving in London for about two decades—an entire generation of players, playwrights, and playgoers—and there was no real market for editions of plays from that theater. Stage success did not automatically translate into print publication.

We don't really know why so few professional plays were printed during these twenty years. What is striking is how suddenly things changed. In 1594 publishers brought out eighteen new playbooks, almost as many as in the previous two decades of professional playing combined. They may have been offered an unusually large number of dramatic manuscripts by the playing companies around that time, because plague had ravaged London throughout 1593, forcing the theaters to close. The resulting dislocations in the theatrical world seem to have thrown an unprecedented number of scripts onto the market, as failing troupes sold off their stock and reformed companies offered their scripts to stationers as advertisements for the reopening of the theaters early in 1594.<sup>9</sup> Publishers in 1594 decided to take the risk of publishing

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<sup>8</sup> See Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Evelyn May Albright, *Dramatic Publication in England, 1580-1640: A Study of Conditions Affecting Content and Form of Drama* (London: Oxford UP, 1927), 277-83; Peter W. M. Blayney, "The Publication of Playbooks" in *A*

professional plays in greater numbers than ever before, and that risk paid off handsomely, because it turned out that people were eager to buy these playbooks.

Of the eighteen first editions published in 1594, five were reprinted within five years (28%), and seven by 1600 (39%); by comparison, in the 1590s in general, only about 12% of books in general were reprinted within five years, and only 20% *within twenty years*. In other words, the 1594 playbooks were far more likely to reach a second edition than the average book, *doubling* the twenty-year “benchmark” for the market as a whole even within the far more limited timeframe of 1594-1600.<sup>10</sup> Since a reprint can be taken to indicate that the previous edition had either sold out or was about to sell out, these figures tell us that the 1594 playbooks were both highly popular with customers and nicely profitable for stationers. As the 1594 plays began to be reprinted *en masse*, along with other plays scattered throughout the 1590s that were also reprinted by 1600, publishers seem to have taken notice of this success.

In 1598, six new plays from the professional theater were published along with seven reprint editions, and for the following fifteen years this increased production continued: an average of thirteen professional plays were published per year from 1598 to 1613, comprising just over 4% of the market as a whole, or one in every twenty-five books. The market for professional playbooks then declined to 1.5% of the retail book trade from 1614 to 1628, before picking up dramatically in the 1630s, when an average of over seventeen plays were published per year, a market share of 3.4%. Throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, playbooks from the professional theater remained far more likely than other books to sell out and be

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*New History of Early English Drama*, John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, eds. (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), 383-422, esp. 386; Erne, 46, 90.

<sup>10</sup> The “market” here includes all “speculative” books (books intended for retail sale), excluding items like royal proclamations, ecclesiastical visitation articles, as well as variant issues and states of the same edition. For a detailed discussion of reprint rates and the methodology for deriving them, see Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, “The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005): 1-32.

reprinted, with about 40% reaching a second edition within twenty years, more than double the overall market average of 18%. While they were never published in the same numbers as, for instance, sermons or religious treatises—partly, of course, because there simply weren't as many plays produced at the professional theaters as there were sermons preached and other religious texts written—those playbooks that did reach the bookshops continued to be an excellent investment for publishers because they were in great demand with readers.<sup>11</sup>

Who were these playbook readers? As with the early interludes, we can get a sense of who early modern publishers *thought* their customers were by studying the material form of the professional plays in print. Very few sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century playbooks address their readers directly or include a printed dedication. Therefore, the frequent scholarly claim that Shakespeare did not care about the publication of his plays—since he provided no prefatory matter for any of his playbooks but did compose dedications for his printed poetry—needs to be qualified and contextualized. During Shakespeare's life, it was entirely normal for playbooks to appear without dedications, prefaces to the reader, commendatory verses, or other kinds of paratext. We should not necessarily assume that Shakespeare was uninterested in his plays in print, merely that, like most authors and stationers, he did not see plays as the sort of book that demanded prefatory material.<sup>12</sup> Over the course of the early seventeenth century, however, as professional plays became more familiar as books, publishers more frequently gave them the paratextual apparatus used for other books, until Thomas Walkley could comment on the

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<sup>11</sup> I am here summarizing the more detailed arguments in Farmer and Lesser, "Popularity"; Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, "Structures of Popularity in the Early Modern Book Trade," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005): 206-13; and Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, "Canons and Classics: Publishing Drama in Caroline England," in Alan B. Farmer and Adam Zucker, eds, *Localizing Caroline Drama: Politics and Economics of the Early Modern English Stage, 1625-1642* (Palgrave, 2006), 17-41. As we show in "Canons and Classics," in the Caroline period the reprint rate for first editions fell precipitously to 9%, but I do not have space here to detail the causes and ramifications of this transformation in the playbook market.

<sup>12</sup> See Erne, 98-9.

solecism of “set[ting] forth a book without an epistle” in his address to the reader of his 1622 edition of *Othello* (sig. A2<sup>r</sup>).

A side effect of this process may have been to make the earlier playbooks seem less “literary,” less “elite,” and more connected to the stage than the study. Certainly some authors and publishers used their prefaces explicitly to distance their plays from the theater: in his preface to *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613), the publisher Walter Burre complained about the ignorance of the spectators who had caused the play’s theatrical failure; John Webster did much the same in *The White Devil* (Thomas Archer, 1612), and the (unsigned) address to the reader of one of the variant issues of Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* (Richard Bonian and Henry Walley, 1609) famously claims that the play was “never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar.”<sup>13</sup> Antitheatricity could be a marketing strategy for printed plays.<sup>14</sup>

More often, however, publishers appealed to a play’s performance on stage and expected their customers to be theater-goers themselves. Richard Hawkins told the readers of his 1628 edition of *Philaster*, for example, that the play was “affectionately taken, and approved by the seeing auditors, or hearing spectators (of which sort I take, or conceive you to be the greatest part),” while also noting the play’s success in print, its “copious vent of two editions.”<sup>15</sup> To Hawkins, and (he clearly expects) to his readers, the desire to watch a play and the desire to read it are mutually complementary and reinforcing, just as they seem to have been for the publishers and purchasers of the early interludes. And on title pages, marketing claims that the book represented the play “as it was performed” by a particular troupe, and at a specific London

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<sup>13</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Famous Historie of Troylus and Cresseid* (1609), sig. ¶2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> See Lesser, *Renaissance*, ch. 2; and Douglas A. Brooks, *From Playhouse to Printing House: Drama and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 43-65.

<sup>15</sup> Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Philaster, or Love Lies a Bleeding* (1628), sig. A2<sup>r</sup>.

theater, replace the play-it-yourself appeal of the interlude title pages. Attributions of a playing company appear regularly on about 60% of editions of professional plays throughout the period, and attributions of theatrical venue rise steadily to about 60% over the period from 1600 to the mid-1640s. This rise in theater attributions after 1600 probably testifies to a growing theatrical culture in London, and to the increasing importance of distinguishing among the different theatrical spaces from which playbooks derived, as the boy companies began playing in the indoor playhouses in 1599, as the King's Men alternated between the Blackfriars and Globe after 1608, and as the Blackfriars and the Cockpit became rival indoor playhouses in the Caroline period.<sup>16</sup> And for provincial play-readers, theater attributions may have appealed to a desire to keep up with London cultural trends.

At the same time, authors were more and more frequently named on the title pages of their plays; by the 1630s, the vast majority of playbook title pages included this attribution, and over the period as a whole, no author was named on more playbooks than Shakespeare.<sup>17</sup> Combined with the rise in prefatory materials, the increase in author attribution helped to transform plays into literary works on a par with other forms of "poesy."<sup>18</sup> Too often, however, it has been thought that the playwright could become an author only by distancing himself and his drama from their theatrical origins. In fact, publishers never stopped emphasizing theatricality as they marketed their books, and even Ben Jonson included much theatrical information in his

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<sup>16</sup> See Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, "Vile Arts: The Marketing of English Printed Drama, 1512-1660," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 39 (2000): 77-165, esp. pp. 84-91.

<sup>17</sup> David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 21.

<sup>18</sup> Among the voluminous scholarship on this subject, see Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988); Margreta De Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, "The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44 (1993): 255-283; James P. Saeger and Christopher J. Fassler, "The London Professional Theater, 1576-1642: A Catalogue and Analysis of the Extant Printed Plays," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 34 (1995): 63-109; Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997); David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1999), and *Shakespeare and the Book*; Brooks; Farmer and Lesser, "Vile Arts"; Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002); Erne; Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

1616 *Works*, the book that above all others has been seen as central to the creation of drama as printed literature. While Jonson used his folio to lend an aura of classical authority to his drama and to fashion himself as an author in the tradition of the Greek and Roman *Opera*, he also told his readers the date of the first performance of his plays, the companies that first staged them, and the principal actors who brought them to life.<sup>19</sup>

Another frequently cited piece of evidence for the “subliterary” nature of playbooks, especially prior to the Jonson and Shakespeare folios, is Thomas Bodley’s admonition to his librarian to exclude playbooks, along with almanacs, proclamations, and other “riffe raffé” from his library, which opened in 1602. He feared that, while the occasional play might be “worthy the keeping,” “the harme that the scandal will bring vnto our Librarie, when it shalbe giuen out, that we stufte it full of baggage bookes,” would far outweigh the possible benefit.<sup>20</sup> Bodley was as much concerned that critics would accuse him of inflating the library’s holdings with cheap pamphlets as he was with the content of plays.<sup>21</sup> And his comments do not seem to have been representative: playbooks were included in the libraries of numerous aristocrats and gentry, who apparently saw no “scandal” in reading, owning, and displaying plays in their studies.<sup>22</sup> Since Bodley’s library was far more public than most, his comments may reveal a disjunction between how people thought they ought to feel about playbooks and how they actually behaved. Or perhaps the relevant division was not between “literary” and “subliterary” but between

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<sup>19</sup> On the creation of the dramatic author within the theatrical milieu, see Farmer and Lesser, “Vile Arts,” 82-4.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Heidi Brayman Hackel, “‘Rowme’ of Its Own: Printed Drama in Early Libraries,” in Cox and Kastan, eds, 113-30, esp. 113.

<sup>21</sup> Brayman Hackel, “Rowme,” 113.

<sup>22</sup> Erne, 11-12; Brayman Hackel, “Rowme,” 124-7; see also the catalogue of the Countess of Bridgewater’s library in Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 258-81.

“scholarly” and “recreational”: like most scholarly libraries, Bodley’s favored Latin over vernacular works in general.<sup>23</sup>

Many prefaces to the readers of playbooks likewise suggest that gentlemen did not scorn to read drama. In one of the earliest printings of a professional play, Richard Jones directed his 1590 edition of Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* to the “Gentlemen Readers: and others that take pleasure in reading Histories.” Jones’s association of the play with (prose) histories continues as he expresses his hope that *Tamburlaine* “wil be now no lesse acceptable vnto you to read after your serious affaires and studies, then they haue bene (lately) delightfull for many of you to see,” adding that, as befits “so honourable & stately a historie,” he has omitted some “fond and friuolous Iestures” that were played on stage but are inappropriate to the “learned” readers of printed drama (sigs. A2<sup>r-v</sup>). From the outset, publishers of professional drama often imagined their customers as elite, male, and learned, and many other playbooks include similar addresses. Some of this may be commercial puffery: a book that touted its worthiness for gentle readers might have been more appealing to readers of whatever social status, and Jones’s inclusion of “others” in his imagined audience indicates a desire not to limit his market to a single social stratum.

The cost of playbooks, however, probably prevented the lower sorts from purchasing them. At an average of nine-and-a-half sheets, plays would generally have retailed for around sixpence, although prices would have surely varied depending on length, popularity, scarcity, and other market factors. Purchasing a play in the bookshop, then, would have cost about six

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<sup>23</sup> I thank Peter Stallybrass for this point. In a fascinating article, he and Roger Chartier have recently argued that some stationers were attempting around 1600 to transform vernacular drama into material worthy of scholarly study and commonplacing, as evidenced by the proliferation of dramatic sententiae in printed commonplace books, often culled from John Bodenham’s papers. See Roger Chartier and Peter Stallybrass, “Reading and Authorship: The Circulation of Shakespeare 1590-1619,” in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text*, ed. Andrew Murphy (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), forthcoming.

times the cheapest price of admission to the Globe or the Rose, restricting the clientele for playbooks far more than for stage productions. But Thomas Heywood's *Four Prentices of London* (John Wright, 1615) is dedicated "To the honest and hie-spirited Prentises The Readers," and so at least this author believed that even apprentices would find a way to read his book. Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (Valentine Simmes, 1600) is similarly addressed "To all good Fellowes, Professors of the Gentle Craft; of what degree soeuer." Each of these plays valorizes apprentices, craftsmen, and manual labor, and so their prefatory material may participate in the ideology of the plays themselves. We must resist the temptation to imagine either these paratexts or their more "gentle" counterparts as transparent representations of the real readership of plays. At the same time, Heywood's and Dekker's addresses remind us not to be too quick to restrict that readership either. While most apprentices would not have been able to spare the sixpence to purchase a favorite playbook, not every reader of a book is a purchaser of it. We have abundant evidence of second-hand reading in the period; books were passed around, read aloud, and given away after they were read, and there was a well-developed commercial trade in used books.

Six playbooks from the professional stage are dedicated to women, including Mary Wroth and Elizabeth Cary, although Robert Baron's *EPOTOIIAII'NION, or The Cyprian Academy* (1647), a nondramatic romance containing a dramatic pastoral and a masque, is the only "playbook" with an address specifically directed to female readers in general.<sup>24</sup> We know from library collections and marginalia as well that play-reading was by no means a male preserve. And one intriguing piece of evidence suggests that play publishers may have considered women among their most important customers. In the 1647 *Comedies and Tragedies*

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<sup>24</sup> On these six dedications, see Marta Straznicky, "Reading through the Body: Women and Printed Drama," in Straznicky, ed., 59-79, esp. 64-5; in addition, Nathan Field's *A Woman is a Weathercock* (1612) is playfully dedicated "To any Woman that hath beene no Weather-Cocke" (sig. A3<sup>r</sup>).

*Written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, Gentlemen*, the publisher Humphrey Moseley took pains to assure his readers that none of the collected plays had been previously published:

Some *Playes* (you know) written by these *Authors* were heretofore Printed: I thought not convenient to mixe them with this *Volume*, which of it selfe is entirely New. And indeed it would have rendred the Booke so Voluminous, that *Ladies* and *Gentlewomen* would have found it scarce manageable, who in Workes of this nature must first be remembred. Besides, I considered those former Pieces had been so long printed and re-printed, that many Gentlemen were already furnished; and I would have none say, they pay twice for the same Booke. (sig. A4<sup>r</sup>)

The passage is confusing: Moseley claims that ladies and gentlewomen are the primary readers of “Workes of this nature,” but then immediately discusses the gentlemen purchasers of plays. Is he drawing a distinction between the men who *buy* plays and the women who *read* them? Or is he perhaps distinguishing between the women who buy and read *collections* of plays (“Workes” in the Jonsonian sense) and the men who buy and read quarto editions (“those former Pieces”)? The details of Moseley’s statement are unclear, and he may simply be offering a courteous explanation for not including previously printed plays, but his comment gives an intriguing glimpse of the women readers of this folio collection: holding it open on their laps, reading aloud from it or listening to others do so (a reading style that seems to have been particularly associated with women), or carrying it back and forth between their country and London residences and so needing the book to be relatively lightweight and “manageable.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Margaret Cavendish, for instance, instructed her readers how to perform her plays in recitative readings (Straznicky, “Reading,” 73). As Straznicky shows, there is a persistent tendency in the period “to associate women’s reading with the body” of the reader, and Moseley follows in this tradition (60). Brayman Hackel writes that “[i]n their book closets and in larger spaces, noblewomen especially seem to have frequently listened as others read.” Heidi Brayman Hackel, “The ‘Great Variety’ of Readers and Early Modern Reading Practices,” in David Scott Kastan, ed., *A Companion to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 139-57, esp. 149.

The evidence suggests that women were prominent, perhaps even more prominent, as consumers of “closet” drama (plays written for reading, whether silently or in household recitative performances, rather than for the commercial theater), possibly because closet drama created the (supposedly, if not actually) “private” environment that more easily enabled female participation; certainly women *wrote* closet drama, while no woman is known to have written for the commercial stage.<sup>26</sup> Nonprofessional drama continued to be published, purchased, and read even after the advent of the commercial stages; from 1594 to 1660, nonprofessional forms like closet drama, masques, university drama, progress entertainments, and Lord Mayor’s shows make up nearly a third of the extant archive of playbooks. Recent scholarship on masques has emphasized that, contrary to earlier views, print publication allowed the genre to move beyond the narrow confines of court culture to a larger reading public. As Lauren Shohet argues, considering the masque in print forces us to rethink long-held ideas about the royal absolutism of the masque form, as masques circulated as “news” to an audience far more heterogeneous than the courtiers (however factionalized) who may have seen them in performance.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, since printed masques (at an average of four sheets per book) were considerably shorter than printed professional plays, this seemingly “elite” dramatic form would in fact have been economically available to a wider segment of society. Masques did not sell out as frequently as professional drama (just over one in ten was reprinted), perhaps not surprisingly in light of the highly topical nature of most masques. In general, nonprofessional drama does not seem to have met with the same high degree of print success as plays from the public stage, although neither

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<sup>26</sup> See Marta Straznicky, *Privacy, Playreading, and Women’s Closet Drama, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Lauren Shohet, *Reading Masques: The English Masque and Public Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).

was it unsuccessful: from 1576 to 1625, 18.4% of first editions were reprinted within twenty years, almost exactly the market average but less than half the rate for professional plays.<sup>28</sup>

Knowing precisely who purchased and read playbooks, whether professional or nonprofessional, is made more difficult by the fact that, unlike more serious and expensive works of divinity, history, or classical literature, playbooks tend not to be listed individually, or included at all, in estate inventories and private library catalogues. Often the best evidence we can find is similar to the catalogue of the Countess of Bridgewater's library, which included "Diuers Playes by Shakespeare" and "Diuerse Playes in 5 thicke Volumes" but not the particular titles that made up these nonce collections.<sup>29</sup> Similar evidentiary difficulties trouble attempts to understand *how* early modern English men and women read plays. Although contemporary marginalia in playbooks is by no means rare, it is less frequent than in other sorts of books, in part because playbooks were not as frequently viewed as matter for scholarly study, but also because later collectors tended to favor clean copies of highly prized books like plays and because some libraries bleached or trimmed the margins of playbooks to create "pristine" copies. More than other kinds of books, the archive of playbooks has been selected against marginalia.<sup>30</sup>

Much of the contemporary marginalia that we can find in playbooks shows readers correcting printing errors in accordance with their understanding of the fictive world of the drama: they change speech prefixes based on their grasp of who "should" be speaking (or based on their memory of an actual performance); they alter individual words, often anticipating modern editorial emendations; occasionally they add stage directions to clarify the action.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> As with professional playbooks, the reprint rate for nonprofessional drama dropped in the Caroline period (1625-1642), to 11.5%. Interestingly, however, this drop was not as precipitous as that of professional drama, and during this period, nonprofessional drama was reprinted more often than professional drama.

<sup>29</sup> Brayman Hackel, *Reading*, 266.

<sup>30</sup> The discussion in this paragraph and the next derives from that in Lesser, *Renaissance*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> For an excellent discussion of readers' annotation practices, see Massai.

These kinds of annotation reveal the close attention that early modern readers paid to the context of individual lines within the entire play. Another prevalent kind of marginalia, the underlining or marginal noting of sententiae, demonstrates an opposing tendency among readers: a desire to *extract* lines from their surrounding context for use in other, sometimes contradictory, situations. In a Folger Library copy of *The Insatiate Countess* (Thomas Archer, 1616), for instance, an early modern reader has written “vndobted / friendshi[p]” next to a reconciliatory exchange between two husbands who each believe the other is cuckolding him (sig. B3<sup>r</sup>). This marginal act of commonplacing, however, completely ignores the dramatic context, as almost immediately the two men fall to arguing again, and the scene is designed to show that their reconciliation is far from undoubted.

Only rarely can we find evidence of contemporary interpretations of a play as a whole; one unusually detailed example can be found in Philip, Earl of Pembroke’s copy of the second edition of George Chapman’s *Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (Thomas Thorpe, 1625).<sup>32</sup> Pembroke’s annotations show that he was reading the play, with considerable precision, through an analogical lens that allowed him to see important personages like the Earl of Leicester and William Prynne figured in the characters in Chapman’s play. It did not matter to Pembroke that Prynne, for instance, could not have been in Chapman’s or anyone else’s mind in 1608 when the play was first performed (and when Prynne was eight years old). The reading habits of the Masters of the Revels, responsible for licensing stage plays, corroborate that this analogical kind of reading was prevalent and expected in the period, for as Richard Dutton has concluded after surveying the history of early modern stage censorship, the Revels Office was largely concerned with “the over-specific shadowing of particular people and current events,

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<sup>32</sup> Albert H. Tricomi, “Philip, Earl of Pembroke, and the Analogical Way of Reading Political Tragedy,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85 (1986): 332-45.

rather than ... considerations of doctrine.”<sup>33</sup> Since this sort of reading bears some resemblance to the pragmatic, contemporary “application” that was a primary mode of humanist reading, we may be justified in concluding that Pembroke was not alone in reading plays through this lens.<sup>34</sup> But reading can be idiosyncratic, and while the allegorical or analogical mode (like systematic commonplacing) was more prominent then than now, it also seems safe to say that the range of reading practices in the early modern period was as broad as it is today, albeit differently configured.

The archive of surviving playbooks thus has much to tell us about the reading practices of early modern English men and women, even if it is often a recalcitrant witness. Playbooks also constitute our primary, and in many cases our only, detailed evidence for the staging of the plays of Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher, and their peers. When we attempt to imaginatively reconstruct the original performances of their plays, we are usually peering (often darkly) through the glass of print, making it all the more important to understand the conditions of printing, publication, and reception, which may have transformed plays on their way from the theater to the printing house to the bookshop to the modern library. At the most basic level, only a small proportion of the repertory of playing companies made the journey into print.<sup>35</sup> Of the remaining majority of plays, we know next to nothing. With older narratives of the transition from stage to page—

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 85. Tantalizing evidence of two lost plays from the professional stage—George Chapman’s *The Old Joiner of Aldgate* (1603) and Thomas Dekker, William Rowley, John Ford, and John Webster’s *The Late Murder in Whitechapel, or Keep the Widow Waking* (1624)—is preserved in the records of libel cases heard in Star Chamber. In these cases, too, interpretation of the plays was by way of “application” to contemporary people and events. C. J. Sisson puts the evidence together in his still useful *Lost Plays of Shakespeare’s Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1936).

<sup>34</sup> See Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, “Studied for Action: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy,” *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 30-78.

<sup>35</sup> E.K. Chambers notes that “[o]f over two hundred and eighty plays recorded by Henslowe ... between 1592 and 1603, we have only some forty,” a publication rate of only about 14% (*The Elizabethan Stage* [4 vols, Oxford: Clarendon, 1923], 3:182), but as the seventeenth century progressed the rate seems to have increased. The records of Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, show that 186 plays were licensed for performance from 1622 to 1642, and 81 of these were printed before 1660, or 44% (Alan Farmer, personal communication). The true (and unrecoverable) figure, therefore, surely lies between these two estimates.

narratives of memorial reconstruction, piracy, bad quartos, and the reluctance of companies to have plays printed—currently sustaining serious critique and revision, we also have no sure understanding of why certain plays were printed while others were not. Fundamental questions about printed drama are thus in the midst of reexamination, and playbooks seem likely to remain for the foreseeable future—as they have been since the beginnings of scholarly bibliography around the turn of the twentieth century—at the center of the study of early English print culture.

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