

SPACES OF PERFORMANCE: SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYHOUSE INSIDE OUT

ESPACIOS DE REPRESENTACIÓN: EL TEATRO DE SHAKESPEARE DESDE DENTRO HACIA AFUERA

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Abstract. It is a truism that plays were written for the space in which they were to be performed: and that therefore to understand Shakespeare, one should understand his playhouses. But though much important work has been done on the physical aspects of Shakespeare's playing spaces —how big they were, how many people they held, how their sightlines and acoustics worked— much less has been written about the way they were interpreted. This article sets out to explain how discrete bits of Shakespeare's indoor and outdoor theatres were understood metaphorically. It argues that the interpretation of the physical structure for which a play was written was as important to audience as the structure itself. Considering five different aspects of the theatre space, I 'On'; II 'Along'; III 'Above and below'; IV 'Around'; and V 'Outside', the article posits that the spacial division of the theatre was as interpretatively important as the five acts in a play. Its conclusions about English performance space raises questions about Spanish golden age theatre too. How were the five geographical 'acts' of Spanish performance, on, along, above and below, around and outside, defined literally and metatheatrically? How do they complicate, refine or rethink the story told here?

Keywords. Scene; Curtain; Genre; Metatheatre; *theatrum mundi*.

Resumen. Es bien sabido que las obras de teatro fueron escritas para el espacio en el que iban a ser representadas y que, por tanto, para entender a Shakespeare, hay que entender sus teatros. Sin embargo, aunque se han realizado muchos estudios importantes sobre los aspectos físicos de los espacios teatrales de Shakespeare —cuán grandes eran, cuántas personas cabían en ellos, cómo funcionaban sus líneas de visión

y su acústica—, se ha escrito mucho menos sobre la forma en que se interpretaba todo esto. Este artículo se propone explicar cómo se entendían metafóricamente las distintas partes de los teatros al aire libre y techados de Shakespeare. Sostiene que la interpretación de la estructura física para la que se escribía una obra era tan importante para la audiencia como la propia estructura. Considerando cinco aspectos diferentes del espacio teatral, I. ‘Sobre’; II. ‘A lo largo’; III. ‘Encima y debajo’; IV. ‘Alrededor’; y V. ‘Afuera’, el artículo postula que la división espacial del teatro era tan importante desde el punto de vista interpretativo como los cinco actos de una obra. Las conclusiones sobre el espacio escénico inglés plantean también preguntas sobre el teatro español del Siglo de Oro. ¿Cómo se definían de modo literal y metateatral los cinco ‘actos’ geográficos de la representación española: sobre, a lo largo, encima y debajo, alrededor y afuera? ¿Cómo complican, mejoran o replantean la historia que aquí se cuenta?

Palabras clave: escena; cortina; género dramático; metateatro; *theatrum mundi*.

ACT I: ON

The apogee of the early modern theatre was its stage. But though often described as an empty space, that structure was most notable for what defined it: a wooden wall that was back of the stage and, simultaneously, front of the ‘tying house’ (in which the actors dressed and undressed, and from which they entered and exited). These days we give that wooden wall its Latin name, ‘frons scenae’, ‘the front of the scene’. But that was not what it was called in the early modern period. Thomas Blount in his *Glossographia*, offers as one of his definitions for the word ‘scene’, ‘the front or forepart of a Theatre or Stage, or the partition between the Players Vestry, and the Stage’¹. That structure, with its entrances and exits, its above and below, its inside and outside, that functionally divided the stage from the tying room was called, simply, the ‘scene’ of the theatre.

The stage ‘scene’ was, in its nature, bound to confuse the literal and the fictional—for, of course, ‘scene’ also meant a segment of an act or, as Bount also had it, ‘the division of a Play into certain parts, [...] sometimes [...] more, sometimes fewer in every Act’². Nor were those two meanings separate: when actors entered from the tying house (through the stage ‘scene’), a new fictional dramatical scene

¹ Blount, *Glossographia or a Dictionary*, 1656, 2M5r-v. For more on the ‘scene’, see Stern, 2013, pp. 11–32.

² Blount, *Glossographia or a Dictionary*, 1656, 2M5r-v.

began; and when they emptied the stage (back through the ‘scene’), the dramatic scene ended. The play’s structure was, then, manifested on the stage physically, suggesting that it was a literalisation and a consequence of the theatre’s physical construction.

The ‘scene’ might represent a variety of places. But with its doors of entrance below and windows above, it most obviously resembled the front of a house and was often treated as such. It is used as the outside of a house, for instance, when Antipholus of Ephesus discovers ‘soft, my door is locked’, gesturing as though at his front door (*Comedy of Errors*, 3.1.30)³. It is equally used as the inside the house when Cressida wonders ‘Who’s that at door?’ gesturing as though at her bedroom door after her night of passion with Troilus (*Troilus and Cressida*, 4.2.37). It can be in the hinterland between fiction and fact when in *Macbeth*, 2.3, the porter sits at one of the scene’s doors ‘inside’ the castle listening to knocking ‘outside,’ while, later, that same door, or another in the same structure, opens into King Duncan’s bedchamber yet further inside the building. These are part-literal examples that exploit the actual features of the ‘scene’ are quintessentially different from examples in which that space is used in an entirely fictional way, as when, for instance, Cassius asks Pindarus to ‘get higher on that hill’ (*Julius Caesar*, 5.3.20). ‘Hill’ for ‘above’ does not reflect the structure and is thus metatheatrically at a further remove from the ‘house’ references; so the scene’s metatheatrical meanings ranged from semi-literal to semi-fictional, requiring less or more in the way of imagination from the audience.

The ‘scene’ was used in a different metatheatrical fashion again when employed as a space for textual props. On occasion, the name of the place where the whole play (or a particular scene) was happening was inscribed on a wooden stave and suspended above one of the scene’s doors of entrance. Such scene-boards are recorded by Sir Philip Sidney who wonders ‘What childe is there, that comming to a play, and seeing *Thebes* written in great letters on an old Doore doth believe that it is Thebes?’⁴ He is probably recalling academic productions—Thebes is the location for many Greek myths—for they mimicked classical

³ Quotations are from Shakespeare, 2016, unless otherwise stated.

⁴ Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, 1595, H1r. For more on scene-boards and title-boards see Stern, 2008 and 2013, and Steggle, 2020.

plays which were thought historically to have used scene-boards⁵. But the use of scene-boards was speedily inherited by popular theatre. Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*, performed in 1601 in the First Blackfriars Playhouse, for instance, refers to such boards when the character Envy wonders where the play to come is taking place: 'The *Scene* is, ha! / Rome? Rome? and Rome?'⁶ All three doors apparently name the same location: a Jonsonian joke. Scene-boards are mentioned as being usual by 1641 when, in James Shirley's *The Cardinal*, for the King's Men, the prologue taunts the spectators with that 'cause we express no scene / We doe believe most of you Gentlemen / Are at this hour in France'⁷. Here the suggestion is that the unexpected absence of the scene-board means that the audience will, as a result, misunderstand where the drama is taking place.

Scene-boards, though, will have had a particular metatheatrical meaning. In one sense, they were never literal, as they were bookish props that bore no relation to reality and only conveyed information to the literate. In another, they were entirely literal, as they unambiguously defined location irrespective of the look of the stage. Their oddity raises questions about several of Shakespeare's plays that survive in the First Folio, the book of his works gathered by fellow actors and published in 1623. '*The Scene Vienna*', for instance, is written just above 'The names of all the Actors' at the end of *Measure for Measure*; while 'The Scene, an un-inhabited Island' is above the 'Names of the Actors' at the end of *The Tempest*⁸. This information about place is not clearly performable, but it is obvious matter for a scene-board, and may preserve its content. Even more tellingly, several of Shakespeare's plays use the word 'scene' towards the beginning of plays or acts to describe the place where the action is happening — 'in Troy, there lies the scene' (*Troilus and Cressida*, Prologue, 1), 'In fair Verona [...] we lay our scene' (*Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue, 2), 'Unto Southampton do we shift our scene' (*Henry V*, 2.0.42). These passages appear to be 'reading' what is on the scene-boards, perhaps for the non-literate; Shakespeare's regular use of 'scene' for location, suggests as much. If, though, Shakespeare employed scene-boards, then for him the written

⁵ See, for instance, illustrations in Terentius Afer, *Comoediae*, 1493.

⁶ Jonson, *The Workes*, 1616, vol. I, 276.

⁷ Shirley, *The Cardinal*, 1652, A4r.

⁸ Shakespeare, *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*, 1623, G6v; B4r.

word, as well as the performed word, will always have been part of the visual geography of performance, confounding physical and fictional, inscribed and aural, stage and page.

Nor was location the only thing that might be written and hung on the 'scene'. Evidence for 'title-boards' —boards in which the name of the play's title was written— also emanates from academic and private theatres, but likewise seems to have expanded to (occasional?) public theatre use. So in *Wily Beguilde*, performed in Paul's Playhouse(?) in 1602, the Prologue wonders 'what play shall wee have here to night?' and is instructed to 'looke upon the Title'. He does so, and is unimpressed: 'What, *Spectrum* once again'. But then a Juggler enters who replaces the old title with a new one, so that, as the stage direction has it, '*Spectrum* is conveyed away: and *Wily beguiled*, stands in the place of it'⁹. Similarly, when the Citizen in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (performed in 1607 in the First Blackfriars Playhouse) demands 'Downe with your Title[,] boy, downe with your Title', he too is requesting something literal and physical: he wants the board reading *The London Merchant*, a play he does not wish to see, to be taken down; the new, real, title, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, is then substituted.¹⁰ Both jokes depend upon the recognisable habit of hanging titles onstage. That habit is found in public theatres from relatively early on, in that Heironymo, setting up the play-within-the-play in *The Spanish Tragedy* (performed c. 1582; printed 1592), asks Balthazar at the start to 'Hang up the Title: our Scaene is *Rhodes*'. He is, in the fiction, staging a court production, but his actions presumably reflect the actual staging of *The Spanish Tragedy* —in a round, outdoor public theatre, either the Rose Playhouse or the Globe¹¹. Likewise Donella, in James Shirley's *Bird in Cage*, a 1633 play for the Phoenix Playhouse, wants to stage a play in prison. Given her location, she has no access to boards, but she asks her women to 'imagine our scene exprest, and the new Prison, the title [,] advanc'd in forme', indicating her belief that plays should be mounted with title-boards —and so suggesting that this was the staging habit in the Phoenix playhouse itself¹².

⁹ Anon, *Wily Beguilde*, 1606, A2r–v.

¹⁰ Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, 1613, B1r.

¹¹ Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, 1592, K2v. The host playhouses for variant plays called *The Spanish Tragedy* are discussed in Syme, 2023.

¹² Shirley, *The Bird in a Cage*, 1633, G4v.

Whether or not Shakespeare used title-boards —and when— has also to be guessed at. Certainly when in *Richard II*, a Globe play, we hear that ‘Our scene is altered from a serious thing, / And now changed to “The Beggar and the King”’ (5.3.79–80), the fact of hanging title-boards on scenes and changing them is referred to by way of metaphor. Shakespeare plays that were written to be performed in the Second Blackfriars Playhouse from 1608 onwards often negotiate in a complex way with their titles in ways that seem to welcome title-board use. If the words *The Tempest* hung on stage throughout production, they would at first describe the literal storm but later come to be seen as a metaphorical description of the emotions that shape the drama. Likewise, *A Winter’s Tale* would have one meaning during the tragic first half of the play; another during the comic second half. Other titles too would certainly have worked advantageously if staged on title-boards: *Love’s Labour’s Lost* would continually redefine the nature of the ‘love’ and the ‘labour’ of the play; *Troilus and Cressida* would be able to flirt with the hinterland between scene-board and title-board, the ‘Troy’ location yielding to Troilus (as the name is originally spelled in the 1609 Quarto title page, and in Shakespeare’s First Folio) by flipping or revealing additional text on the scene.

Whatever is the case, the ‘scene’ and its boards contributed to productions whether used literally or fictionally —or, as this section has suggested, in a way that hovered between the two. By its title, ‘scene’, it contributed to the audience’s understanding of the structure of the play’s content and its geography. By its look, resembling a building, it enhanced some dramatic readings, frustrated others. By its written content when used —or by the absence of such content when not used— it made itself a space for inscribed, rather than performed, words, that also will have divided the audience between those who could and those who could not read. Though fixed in nature, then, the ‘scene’ was unfixed in meaning, and exploited and rejected metatheatre, drip feeding information to some audience members that was denied to others.

ACT II: ALONG

The ‘scene’ could hold two, or perhaps more, curtains, presumably attached to rails above the doors of entrance. These hangings also participated in metatheatre, for they gave information pictorially.

Often what they seem to have stated, through colour and image, was genre.

Black curtains signified ‘tragedy’. So Richard Rowlands tells of ‘A spacious *Theatre*’ that is ‘All hang’d with black to act some tragedie’¹³; and when the genres Comedy, History and Tragedy battle for ascendancy in the prelude to *A Warning for Fair Women* (perf. 1599 by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men), they give up when History observes that the genre is already determined: ‘The stage is hung with blacke: and I perceive / The Auditors prepare for Tragedie.’¹⁴ That the ‘scene’ might also hold genre expanded its relationship to a play’s title page, which often also conveyed that information (for instance, *The Tragoedy of Othello*, 1622). Curtains made their statement outside dialogue, just as a playbook’s title-page stated genre before ‘the play’ started; for curtains might already hang in place before a performance began and could remain there after it ended, so dictating the mood of the audience and the atmosphere of the playhouse around and beyond the play.

Use of ‘tragedy’ curtains in plays is seldom stated, but in John Marston’s *Insatiate Countess* (performed Whitefriars Theatre c. 1610), Don Sago concludes that ‘The stage of heav’n, is hung with solemne black, / A time best fitting, to Act Tragedies’¹⁵; in *Northward Ho* Bellamont, hoping to stage a tragedy dictates that ‘the stage’ be ‘hung all with black velvet’¹⁶; and William Browne compares the world ‘in a mourning robe’ to ‘A Stage made for a wofull Tragedie’¹⁷. *1 Henry VI* (performed in the Rose Playhouse, 1591?) —a somewhat Shakespearean play— opens with Bedford proclaiming ‘Hung be the heavens with black!’ (1.1.1). Fictionally a funeral is taking place, for which black would be appropriate, though whether the stage *is* hung with black or *should be* is unclear; the language recognises that staging *can* state genre but does not record whether or not in this instance it does so. Hamlet’s obsession with black cloth —and the fact that he therefore bears tragedy about his person— makes further colour symbolism likely

¹³ Rowlands, «Visions of the Worlds Instabilitie», in *Odes in Imitation of the Seaven Penitential Psalmes*, 1601, H1r.

¹⁴ Anon, *A Warning for Faire Wömen*, 1599, A3r. For more on curtains and genre, see Stern, 2021.

¹⁵ Marston, *The insatiate countesse*, 1613, H2r.

¹⁶ Dekker, *North-ward Hoe*, 1607, E3r.

¹⁷ Browne, *Britannia’s pastorals. The first booke*, 1625, I3r.

in the play that bears his name, not least because the play requires stage hangings through which Polonius can be stabbed. When tragic curtains were used, and how often they were used straightforwardly, however, remains open to question, but that theatre curtains were in regular theatrical use, and were ‘read’ in situ, does not.

The genre of ‘history’ seems to have had curtains too: busy ones, that contained frozen moments of story sewn or painted onto them. So John Taylor, describing a Jesuit, depicts a fictional world in which ‘The Stage [is] all hang’d with the sad death of Kings, / From whose bewailing story sorrow springs’¹⁸; and Jasper Mayne writes of ‘dead Arras-Captains,’ depicted on the hangings, ‘which [...] threaten to assault the spectator with *imaginary, woven Lunces* [lances]’¹⁹. Such chatty curtains could enhance or offer counter-narratives to what was happening on stage; if filled with pictorial characters they could also be used to swell the putative numbers of people in a scene. If, though, the story of a living king might be told in front of curtains that foretell his sad end; or a peaceful meeting —or a warlike one (again, when the irony is or is not there is unclear)— could be staged against ‘battle’ curtains, then ‘history curtains’ might predict, shape, question or demand particular moments and types of story. The curtains are potentially mischievous. One wonders what the curtains behind which Falstaff sleeps in *1 Henry IV* will have depicted.

On the playbook of Nathaniel Richards’ *The Tragedy of Messallina* (1640) are a series of vignettes drawn by his friend and fellow-playwright, Thomas Rawlins. One little picture shows a thrust stage with ‘comedy’ —or perhaps romantic— curtains along the back. Two separate curtains cover the length of the stage, with a division in the middle, perhaps for a door of entrance. On the right is a Cupid with an arrow nocked on his bowstring and aimed at the opposite curtain; on the left, the person destined to be hit. Similar romance curtains may be referred to in Jonson’s *Cynthia’s Revels*, where the boy asks not to be compared to the ‘fresh pictures, that use to beautifie the decayed dead arras, in a publike theatre’: pictures, apparently, of beautiful youths²⁰. Are the erotic chamber hangings in *Cymbeline* ‘comic’ curtains —raising questions about that play’s tragic-comic genre? What of

¹⁸ Taylor, *The Water-Cormorant his Complaint*, 1622, A4r.

¹⁹ Mayne, *A late printed sermon against false prophets*, 1647, F2r.

²⁰ Jonson, 1616, *The Workes*, vol. I, Q2r.

the curtains that are drawn in front of the gold, silver and lead caskets in *Merchant of Venice*?

The extent to which such curtains were used by all theatres, whether they could be changed mid-show or hung throughout, and when they were ironic, are all open to question. But their presence and likewise their absence would inflect Shakespeare's dramas —and he seems to have opted for them, on occasion, for that very reason. Though it is unclear when and how genre might be hung onstage, cloth does seem to have been a prompt for interpretation that curtains will have enhanced, queried, and frustrated by their absence as well as their presence. That productions could foreground genre on the 'scene' gives the theatre the ability to tell narratives and counter narratives, on a play-by-play basis, by the very nature of its space. Again, this somewhat confounds what we take metatheatre to be: for curtains will sometimes have told literal stories; sometimes contained block colours to be read. What can be said is that they conveyed extra, visual and 'beyond text' material, generally about genre, that provided a background to all plays that employed them, and that will have affected the look of performance from the moment the space was entered.

ACT III: ABOVE AND BELOW

As the planet was understood in the early modern period, heaven was located above; hell was located below; and the world itself was in between. That was also, notionally, the structure of the stage space in front of the 'scene'. 'Above' was, as Heywood puts it, 'the coverings of the stage' which 'wee call the heavens'²¹. The 'coverings' was the term he used for a roof extending partway over the thrust stage in outdoor theatres, offering actors protection from rain or sun, and creating a small reverberating chamber —a sandwiched space— in which voices carried better. That roof was metaphorical as well as practical, for its name of 'heavens' was manifested in the images of stars, the sun, and Zodiacal signs that were painted on its underside. Court accounts, like the 1564 payment made for 'divers devises [devices] as the heavens &

²¹ Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, 1615, D2v. For more on 'heaven', 'hell' and the 'theatrum mundi' motif, see Stern, 2013.

clouds', show that indoor stages too might have heavens, however;²² and when R. M. describes an actor who 'raves, rages, and protests much by his painted Heavens', he suggests private theatre use too, as 'painted' is a state of decoration rather than a structure²³. Shakespeare's late plays, too, seem to expect a ceiling decorated with stars, as when Belarius, returning the two princes he long ago stole from their father Cymbeline in the play of that name, petitions 'The benediction of these covering heavens' to 'Fall on their heads [...] for they are worthy / To inlay heaven with stars' (*Cymbeline*, 5.5.349-51). Having heaven and hell as a spacial division seems to have originated in churches where images of angels and God were placed on the ceiling and in the rafters; hell was understood to be below, under the earth.

In *Hamlet*, direct reference is made to the stage heavens. When the prince tries to explain how life no longer gives him pleasure, he looks, it seems, at the painted ceiling above him, fretted (embossed —or possibly in a checkered pattern) with 'fires' (stars):

I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, [...] this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire —why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors (*Hamlet*, 2.2.257-264).

Inside the fiction, Hamlet no longer finds joy in earth or heaven; but on the level of theatre, the character rejects his painted roof, disdaining, metatheatrically, the stage that houses his story.

The 'heavens' were used as a location for 'good' entrances — though, as an entrance from heaven required suspending an actor from a hatch above, perhaps only in the later, rebuilt Globe or Second Blackfriars Playhouse. The God Jupiter '*descends*' on the back of an Eagle to give Posthumous a riddle that solves his problems in *Cymbeline* (5.4.62), and Juno too '*descends*' to bless the betrothal Miranda and Ferdinand in *The Tempest* (4.1.101). The location of these entrances, then, conveys extra textual information to the audience.

The reverse was true of the area under the stage, which was understood to be 'bad'. It was '*Hell*' which, according to Thomas Dekker's

²² Feuillerat, 1908, p. 117.

²³ R. M., *Micrologia*, 1629, B3r.

Devil', was 'vnder euerie one of their *Stages*'²⁴. That area was, of course, always 'read' by the audience. So Hamlet in *Hamlet* wonders whether the ghost he has met was really his father or a 'goblin damned' (1.5.40) —but the audience know the answer. The ghost is deeply related, in the language of the play, to the stage's hell. He repeatedly cries 'swear' (1.5.152) from an area that, as Hamlet cannot stop reminding the audience, is under the stage —he is in 'the cellarage' (1.5.154); he resembles a creature who lives underground in burrows and tunnels an 'old mole' (1.5.164). Hamlet, inside his fiction, cannot read the ghost's location, but the audience observing the stage structure, see a drama with a ghost located in hell²⁵. More simply, when in *Titus Andronicus* Aaron the Moor is buried in sand, he will stand in the stage's trapdoor, his feet in the 'hell' to which the play has damned him. Objects that rise from hell, or descend into it, are terrible: like the apparitions and witches' cauldron in *Macbeth* (4.1.104).

The heaven/hell divide literalised the metaphor that governed the playhouse: the ancient classical motif of the 'theatrum mundi' (literally, 'the world as stage'). With heaven above and hell below, the stage was the world itself: hence 'All the world's a stage' (*As You Like It*, 3.1.139), 'I hold the world [...] but as [...] A stage' (*Merchant of Venice*, 1.1.77–8), 'let this world no longer be a stage' (*2 Henry 4*, 1.1.155). It is no surprise that Shakespeare's company, perhaps Shakespeare himself, chose The Globe as the name for their playhouse. Shakespeare's 'stage', already fictionally the world in building terms, was literally his 'world' in naming terms. Metatheatre was part of Shakespeare's buildings, from title onwards, and his staging exploited and batted on that fact.

ACT IV: AROUND

Around the stage was the audience: indeed, as in all theatres of the period, the stage was 'thrust' into their midst (it is sometimes called a 'thrust stage' for this reason), so the audience were on all sides of the performance space. And, as the audience itself was always in sight, so its look was part of the wider setting of the drama and became, itself, part of the meaning of the plays.

²⁴ Dekker, *Nevves from hell brought by the Diuells carrier*, 1606, B1v.

²⁵ See Stern, 2004, p. 26.

It was usual to understand the seating or standing spaces occupied by audience members hierarchically. As the more one paid, the better one's seat, so theatres were roughly divided into financial ranks, and audience space was usually named for the amount of money (differing from theatre to theatre) that it cost: we hear of 'Stinkards sitting in the Penny-Galleries of a Theater, and yawning vpon the Players'²⁶; learn that 'Sloth himselfe will come, [to] sit in the two-pennie galleries amongst the Gentlemen'²⁷; and are instructed that 'at a new play' a would-be gallant should 'take up the twelve-penny rome next the stage'²⁸.

The fact of naming space by money indicates the extent to which the audience's location, whether sitting or standing, was viewed commercially²⁹; while audience itself was viewed as a manifestation of its money, spent in the cause of entertainment: 'How many are there,' asks William Prynne in disgust, of spectators, 'who [...] spend 2d. 3d. 6d. 12d. 2s. and sometimes 4 or 5 shillings at a Play-house, day by day, if [...] Tobacco, Wine, Beere, and such like vaine expences which Playes doe usually occasion, be cast into the reckoning?'³⁰ There were no tickets or numbered seats at the time, so theatre-goers had to arrive well before performance in order to buy their way into the correct area and then jostle for a good place to sit or stand. As they tended, therefore, to turn up to playhouses up to an hour before performance, they were obvious targets for salesmen and women —and goods, it seems, were marketed to them according to their ability to pay.

Traders roved throughout the audience selling food and drink: 'fruits, such as apples, pears and nuts,' notes traveller Paul Hentzner in 1598, were sold in theatres, 'as well as ale and wine'³¹. The remains of the Rose playhouse, recently excavated by archaeologists, bears more witness to sales of snacks than to performance itself —a few objects that may, but may not, be props have been found, but the audience space is filled with leftovers of snacking— shells not just of hazelnuts and walnuts, but also shellfish —cockles, periwinkles, crabs, mussels

²⁶ Middleton, *Father Hubburds tales*, 1604, B4r.

²⁷ Dekker, *The seuen deadly sinnes of London*, 1606, 27.

²⁸ Dekker, *Father Hubburds tales*, 1609, A1v.

²⁹ Stern, 2022 and Aaron, 2005.

³⁰ Prynne, *Histrion-mastix*, 1633, 2T1v.

³¹ Hentzner, *A Journey into England by Paul Hentzner in the year 1598*, 1757, p. 43.

and whelks; pips and stones from apples, pears, plums, cherries, figs, grapes, elders, blackberries, raspberries and peaches³². Most sales took place in the spaces where the theatre-goers stood, for having acquired their spots, they would not risk leaving them to make purchases. Instead, as William Prynne explains, ‘the Pot, the Can, [and] the Tobacco-pipe are alwayes walking till the Play be ended’: snack sellers wove their way through the ranks of the audience, selling throughout performance³³, a point also clear from descriptions of the ‘Tobacco-men’, who ‘walk up and downe, selling for a penny pipe, that which was not worth twelve-pence an horse-load’³⁴.

Audience sale affected the sound of the audience space, of course. The goods to be purchased had to be ‘cried’ (announced in a loud, singsong voice; a way of advertising what one was selling), so the sound of the audience areas was also the sound of making money. I.H. complains about the breath of the ‘Oyster-crying audience’ at the Red Bull during performances of Greene’s *Tu Quoque*³⁵; Henry Fitzgeffrey, writing of the Second Blackfriars Playhouse, says he could be temporarily deafened —‘made *Adder*-deafe’— ‘with *Pippin*-crye’, the sound of advertising sweet apples³⁶. Aurally, then, the theatre space resembled a market or a street of London shops. It is no surprise that spectators could be distracted from the fiction they were watching by their own playhouse snacks: Shakespeare in the most literal way addressed this when, in *Henry VIII*, the porter speaks out about ‘the youths that thunder at a playhouse and fight for bitten apples’ (5.4.54); he had earlier asked whether the ‘rude rascals’ are hoping to get ‘ale and cakes here’ (5.4.9). But on other occasions food and drink references in Shakespeare’s plays are nuanced by theatre sale —‘thou wilt quarrel with a man for cracking nuts’, *Romeo and Juliet* (3.1.18–19) is loaded when the audience is cracking nuts; Falstaff’s passion for sack may reflect, but perhaps also encourage, playhouse sale, functioning as a kind of product placement. That theatre space, then, affected the props Shakespeare chose to stage —sometimes annoyed by it (in ways that may encourage sale, of course), sometimes literally promoting it.

³² Bowsher and Miller, 2009, pp. 148–153.

³³ Prynne, *Histrio-mastix*, 1633, 3T4r.

³⁴ Anon, *The Actors Remonstrance*, 1643, 7.

³⁵ I. H., *This vworlds folly*, 1615, B2r.

³⁶ Fitzgeffrey, *Notes from Black-Fryers*, in *Satyres and Satyricall Epigrams*, 1617, E7v.

The financial nature of its space, literally and as seen and understood, is tensely present throughout Shakespeare's dramas.

ACT V: OUTSIDE

The playhouse did not start and stop with the building itself, of course. For 'outside' playhouses, hovering by their entrances and exits, was a place of further entertainment and further sale. Ballad-singers—men and women who sold printed songtexts by singing them—seem regularly to have traded just beyond the theatre walls. Robert Greene complains of the 'unsufferable loytring qualitie' of people 'singing of Ballets and songs at the doors of such houses where plaies are used'³⁷; and William Cartwright in his play *The Ordinary* depicts 'a Balladmonger' as someone who needs to 'Stand in a Play-house doore' to trade³⁸. Yet though located outside the playhouse altogether, the space related closely to what took place within the theatre, for the songs to be sold beyond the precincts seem often to have related to what happened inside the theatre, telling the stories of the plays shown inside, or introducing, or reprising, the words and tunes staged in the plays themselves. Wither describes 'A Curtain Iigge, [...] or a Ballet'—broadsheets for the songs performed inside the Curtain Playhouse—as songs for 'some Rogues with staffe and wallet / To sing at doores'³⁹. Outside the theatre, then, was a place for related sales of merchandise, expanding or questioning our sense of what 'theatre' is and when it—and its related commerce—starts and stops.

The external playhouse doors were spacially extensions of the playhouses themselves, as it was by them that spectators waited in queues to pay for entrance. These would-be theatre-goers were already primed to pay for entertainment, and were thus ideal targets for salespeople. Those same doors of entrance were where, too, spectators exited, having been entertained in the theatre not just with plays, but also ballads, regularly sung in the dramas, and often sung and danced after them in the form of a clown's jig. Ballad-singer/sellers flanking

³⁷ Greene, *The third and last part of conny-catching*, 1592, B1v.

³⁸ Cartwright, *The ordinary*, 1651, D4v-D5r. For more on ballad-singer/sellers outside the playhouse, see Stern, 2023.

³⁹ Wither, *Abuses stript, and whipt*, 1613, R1v.

the playhouses were, then, useful to the theatre: in advance of performance they could calm the queue while introducing it to the music that was to come; after performance, they could reprise music and aid a peaceful exit.

Ballads about plays do not always survive, but are borne witness to in the Stationers' Registers, the books in which publishers recorded textual ownership. There is, for instance, an entry on the Stationers' Register on 6 august 1596 for 'A newe ballad of Romeo and Juliett', presumably a telling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, a play currently in performance though not itself to be published as a playbook until the following year. Or there is the double entry on the Stationers' Register of 6 Feb 1594 in which John Danter, the publisher, records not only 'a booke intituled a Noble Roman Historie of TYTUS ANDRONICUS' —Shakespeare's play— but 'the ballad thereof'⁴⁰. These ballads are joined by the *Lamentable Song of the Death of King Leare*, which tells the Lear story, and a series of ballads which tell stories attendant on plays, like *The Frolicksome Duke*, which gives the 'frame' story of *The Taming of the Shrew*⁴¹; and the ballad of 'the crueltie of Gernutus a Iew, who lending to a / Marchant a hundred Crownes, would haue a pound of his Flesh, / because he could not pay him at the day appointed', which relates to *The Merchant of Venice*⁴².

There are also bits inside Shakespeare plays that seem to join with the ballad singer/sellers outside, promoting and selling their songs. Hamlet's 'One fair daughter and no more, / The which he lovèd passing well'; 'as by lot, / God wot'; 'It came to pass, / As most like it was' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.332–344), are lines from the first verse of a printed ballad *Jephthah Judge of Israel*. Here is the start of that ballad, which survives in a later edition (ballads were ephemeral, and often only survive in later reprintings):

I Read that many yeares agoe,
when *Jepha* Judge of *Israel*,
Had one faire daughter and no moe,
whom he beloved passing well⁴³.

⁴⁰ Arber, 1875–1884, 3:68; 2:644.

⁴¹ Anon, *The Frolicksome Duke*, c. 1664–1703.

⁴² Anon, *A new Song, shewing the crueltie of Gernutus a Iew*, c. 1620?

⁴³ Anon, *A proper new ballad, intituled, Jephthah Judge of Israel*, c. 1620.

When Hamlet compares Polonius to Jephtha from the bible, and then sings bits of this ballad, his words anticipate an audience who can complete the biblical narrative told by the song in which Jephtha ‘pays’ for the victory he achieves by sacrificing his virgin daughter: or, rather, theatre-goers who do know how the song continues will find that it foreshadows what Polonius then does with Ophelia. Hamlet, speaking to an audience expected to be familiar with the ballad broadsheet, may imagine that they have had the chance to buy it on their way in to the theatre: or, at least, performance is enhanced if that is the case.

Another play that relies on audience-knowledge of a ballad to make its point is *Othello*. In the folio version of that play, the unhappy Desdemona sings several stanzas of a ballad that mirrors her situation⁴⁴:

DESDEMONA

My mother had a maid called Barbary:
 She was in love, and he she loved proved mad
 And did forsake her. She had a song of “willow”:
 An old thing ’twas, but it expressed her fortune,
 And she died singing it. [...]
[sings] The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree:
 Sing all a green willow.
 Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee:
 Sing willow, willow, willow (4.3.25–41).

The ballad she sings survives in a printed broadsheet of the time, where it is called *A Lovers complaint being forsaken of his Love*⁴⁵. Shakespeare again seemed to expect his audience to know not just the story, but also the words of this ballad, right up to the seventh stanza, which Desdemona begins singing, only to break off as she misremembers the text:

“Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve”—
 Nay, that’s not next (4.3.48–9).

⁴⁴ The ballad is prepared for but not sung in the quarto, probably because of vocal issues in the playhouse. See Honigsmann, 2016, appendix one, pp. 349–356.

⁴⁵ Anon, *A Lovers complaint*, c. 1615?

Asking the audience to summon up the correct line (which, in the printed ballad concludes ‘I die for her love’)⁴⁶ this ballad too fore-shadows what will happen, Desdemona’s death, but only to spectators with deep knowledge of the text—who are, perhaps, reading the text while watching the play.

In the latter instance, however, the song is further complicated by the fact that, in the printed broadsheet, its subject is an unhappy man, not an unhappy woman:

A poore soule sat sighing under a Sycamore tree
O willow, willow, willow,
 With his hand on his bosome, his head on his knee,
O willow, willow, willow.

The change of sex in Shakespeare’s play, however, simply allows the song to do further work for the audience who are following along: it is literally about Desdemona’s love-sorrow, but is also, behind that, about Othello’s, for anyone who knows both versions. Once more, Shakespeare seems to anticipate an audience who have access to the printed ballad for his performance and who have, perhaps, just purchased it: that also means that his play ‘inside’ is gesturing towards, and hoping for the extension of, ‘outside’.

If, however, the theatre extended its trade to the space beyond its precincts—either tacitly, by allowing ballad-singers to sell their broadsheets there; perhaps more actively by collaborating with those tradespeople—that means that ‘outside’ the playhouse and ‘beyond’ the play were also a further aspect of ‘inside’ the playhouse/play, extending the reach of drama beyond the theatre’s wooden walls, and making clear how this threshold space had an important interpretative relationship to meaning. In this instance, the space itself is metatheatrical, a place where ‘theatre’ is redefined, and where fiction and ‘reality’ come together in songs, literally sung but concerning related fictions, expanding and extending what theatre, space, and fiction are understood to be.

⁴⁶ Porter, 1997, p. 171.

CONCLUSION

The early modern playhouse has been shown to have consisted of a range of physical locations where fiction meets reality: literal spaces with layered metatheatrical meanings. Those conflicted fictional/real meanings have then been shown to have been battened upon by Shakespeare, and others, so that space becomes part of the way drama is written in the first place, as well as the way it is performed and understood by the audience. The examples throughout have focused on Shakespeare, partly for convenience, partly because he wrote both for round outdoor spaces (The Theatre; The Globe) and square indoor ones (The Blackfriars Playhouse; court), his range of theatres bringing what might seem to be contradictory spaces in conversation with one another: all the issues covered here may be seen, through Shakespeare, to be potentially true of public and private theatres. But are they also true of Spanish Golden Age theatre? When Calderón de la Barca wrote a play *El gran teatro del mundo* (published 1655), he showed how he too was governed by the metaphor that so obsessed Shakespeare, that the world is the stage. Calderón's play was an allegory in which the playwright is God; it will of necessity have made metaphorical demands of the spaces that housed it. The sophisticated stages of the Spanish Golden Age, however, are likely to have contributed yet further interpretative possibilities. I look forward to learning what they are.

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