

AUTHORS, AUDIENCES, AND ELIZABETHAN PROLOGICS

A Dissertation

by

JACOB ALLEN HEIL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2009

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Authors, Audiences, and Elizabethan Prologics. (December 2009)

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In examining examples of prologues, inductions, and choruses from early modern drama, *Authors, Audiences, and Elizabethan Prologics* tries to frame a more comprehensive picture of dramatists' relationships with the plays they write and the audiences for whom they write them. It suggests that these various prologics are imbued with an intrinsic authority that provides something of a rubric, perceptible by both playwright and playgoer, through which one can measure the crucial negotiations with and within the shifting valences of dramatic representation in the early modern period. The project develops a way of thinking about the prologic as a hermeneutics unto itself, one which allows us to contextualize more adequately the manner in which playwrights conceptualize and construct their own relationship to nascent notions of authorship and authority.

My first body chapter (Chapter II) considers the rhetorical construction of audiences' silences in various Elizabethan interludes, suggesting that such ideal silences register one's contemplative engagement with the performance and, thus, work to legitimize early drama. The prologues to John Lyly's plays—my subject in Chapter III—exemplify the desire to legitimize, instead, the playwright. Reading Lyly's plays

alongside his letters of petition to Queen Elizabeth and Sir Robert Cecil, one can see the manner in which Lyly creates an authorial persona rooted in his rhetorical skills. In Chapter IV I examine Shakespeare's sparse but measured use of prologues to manipulate his audiences' preconceptions of theatrical conventions and to guide them toward a consideration of what it means to have interpretive agency, how far that agency extends, and where to locate the limits of narrative in the necessarily liminal domain of the theater. Finally, I argue in Chapter V that Thomas Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* expands the prologic space, mimicking in the playspace the critical, interactive stance that he assumes in the printed marginalia of his prose writing. This is to say that *Summer's Last Will* echoes—or in many cases prefigures—the authorial anxieties that Nashe expresses elsewhere in his work, and chief among them is an anxiety over the interpretational agency of the reader and auditor.

DEDICATION

This dissertation would not have been possible without Barbara, who has been an accommodating sounding board and an encouraging spouse, and whose model of perseverance and achievement I strive to emulate in my own work.

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My heartfelt appreciation goes to my committee for their encouragement and help from the inception of my project until now, and for their future advice as the dissertation continues to develop. I am particularly thankful to my chair, Dr. James Harner, who has supported my writing and my professional development; to Dr. Howard Marchitello who was an early, supportive sounding board for the ideas in this project; and to Dr. Gary Stringer for instilling and fostering an interest in investigating the stories that books' physical details have to share.

I am also appreciative of the support I have received from those in Texas A&M's English department who, through sickness and health, accommodated my changing circumstances and provided opportunities in which my academic work, my research, and my teaching could flourish. Moreover, I am privileged to have had so many colleagues in the department who are not only scholarly models but have also been generous with their ideas and in their consideration of mine.

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Finally, I must thank my family. They provide models for success as various as their unique personalities and I am as sincerely grateful for their inspiration as I am for their unconditional love and support.

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CHAPTER I

“WHAT’S PAST IS PROLOGUE”:

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROLOGIC

The north entrance to the United States’ National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. is home to Robert Aitken’s statue, “The Future.” A female figure sits with an open book in her lap, but her left hand reaches to the back of her seat as her right foot slides slightly forward, and with her eyes raised she seems poised to remove the book and to move from her stone pedestal. Inscribed on the statue’s base is a near quotation from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611, 1623)¹: “What is past is prologue” merely undoes the contraction of Shakespeare’s “what’s past is prologue” (2.1.249).² With the National Archives as its backdrop, Shakespeare’s line speaks to the Archives’ mission to serve “American democracy by safeguarding and preserving the records of our Government, ensuring that the people can discover, use, and learn from this documentary heritage” (“Mission”). This “documentary heritage” is figured by the female figure’s book and, having learned from its records of the past, she may safely go forth into the future that she spies in the northern distance.

This dissertation follows the MLA style manual, 7th Edition.

¹ The two dates represent the date of first performance, followed by the date of first publication and are derived from Alan B. Farmer’s and Zachary Lesser’s *DEEP: Database of Early English Playbooks*. Unless otherwise noted, the dates of plays will appear in this manner, parenthetically following the first mention of a play.

² Unless otherwise noted, citations of Shakespeare’s works are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, first edition. Here and throughout I will cite these parenthetically, indicating prologues as act “0,” hence the first line of a plays’ prologue would be (1.0.1).

Shakespeare scholars will recognize, however, that the phrase is lifted from a nefarious context. Having already usurped Prospero's dukedom in Naples, Antonio suggests that Sebastian take advantage of the "destiny" (2.1.248) presented by the tempest that has tossed the Neapolitan court onto the coast of Prospero's island: King Alonso's only son is (incorrectly) presumed to have drowned while his only daughter has just been wed to the King of Tunis and now dwells far from her native Naples. Antonio casts the tempest in a dramatic conceit wherein he and Sebastian shall "perform an act" (2.1.248)—to murder Gonzalo so that Sebastian, the King's brother, can usurp his distant niece's right to the throne—the prologue to which is the opportunity that the storm has afforded them. In Antonio's play the "prologue" facilitates his manipulative designs on advancement; he sees the prologue as less a documentary record than an authorizing agent.

Despite their differences in tone, both "The Future" and *Tempest* frame the concept of the "prologue" as a preliminary mode of representation, the interpretation of which fashions the movement onward to the thing itself. Their interpretation is similar to the ways in which we moderns think of prologues as preliminaries that bridge a gap between the world, if you will, inside of a text and our world outside of it. The key difference between our (textual) thoughts about the prologue and the conceptualizations of "The Future" and Antonio is that for the latter two the prologue—the "past"—is integrally tied to the future; in fact, to a certain extent, their "prologues" authorize their future "action." We, on the other hand, often can turn past prologues if we choose. Derrida latches on to this sense of dispensability, which runs counter to "The Future"

and to Antonio's conceptualizations of prologues, when he suggests that "Prefaces, along with forewords, introductions, preludes, preliminaries, preambles, prologues, and prolegomena, have always been written, it seems, in view of their own self-effacement" (*Dissemination* 9). Even when these formal frames are read it is with one eye on the other side of them. My project is not interested in Derrida's concept of the self-effacing, textual prologue, but in the prologue as a performance. In the theatrical context the prologue does not fade into the past, nor is it subject to the reader's whim; rather, the performed prologue bears at once the immediacy of the present and the authority of its own past.

The prologic space, pace Derrida, plays a crucial role in our conceptualization of early modern authority. In framing its "liminality" as a central feature, Gerard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* suggests that the "paratext" is "a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for a text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eye of the author and his allies" (1-2). The focal point of Genette's study is the novel, and the author's "allies" and "reception" have more to do with the act of reading books than with hearing performances of plays. Nevertheless, his observations regarding the intrinsic authority of the paratext are central to this study of early modern dramatic prologues, for it is precisely this liminality that affords the early modern playwright the opportunity—the last opportunity before the play effectively is given over to the audience—to "influence ... the public." While my project is not focused on the plays as material books, Genette's

notion of the paratext constructing “a more pertinent reading” nonetheless finds an antecedent in the prologues’ negotiation of audiences’ measured engagements with their plays. Certainly the spirit of Genette’s rendering of the paratext—though not his exempla—provides a base upon which studies of early modern prologues may be built.

Accordingly, Genette’s notion of liminality resonates in Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann’s insightful explorations in *Prologues to Shakespeare’s Theatre*, to which much of my own study is indebted. Bruster and Weimann account for the prologue as a textual space, as the theatrical performance of that space, and as the actor presenting that performance. They define their project as two-fold. On one hand they render the landscape of the use of prologues throughout the early modern period with “a brief literary and cultural history of the prologue” (153), reiterating, for example, that the Prologue would have donned a black cloak and a bay laurel. They suggest that he would have been an apprentice actor with an attendant sense of anxiety as he moved toward the ranks of the established actors; like the prologue itself, then, he was in a transitional state.³ In addition, Bruster and Weimann detail the overall picture of the early modern prologue with, as another example, statistical data on prologue frequency (the form reaches an apparent apex in the 1590s) and on the average prologue length (fifteen to thirty-five lines, varying with regard to playwright and auspices). On the other hand of their two-fold endeavor, Bruster and Weimann’s critical work maps cultural shifts in

³ In examining character doubling patterns and the staged juxtaposition of the Prologue and Vice in early drama, Bruster and Weimann suggest that this speaks to “the relative status – and, perhaps, talent – of the performer directed to deliver the prologue” (18). Perhaps status, but with regard to talent David Bevington notes that, in the doubling in *Mankind* and other early plays, “the players normally double roles that are diametrically opposed in the spiritual conflict” (87), thus suggesting that this would have required a degree of “versatility” and, no doubt, histrionic skill. Here and throughout, I will capitalize Prologue to differentiate the actor playing the role from the form of the prologue.

modes of dramatic authorization in the period. Beginning with Marlowe's prologue to *Tamburlaine* (1587, 1590) they find "a remarkable shift in the paradigm of authorization in the theatre": "From the partially anonymous culture of humble clerics, unlearned writers, and common players, the level of legitimation shifts toward (and assumptions of validity are redefined by) a self-confident sense of authorship in full command of the fine arts of rhetoric" (81). Moving through the period, along the way developing our understanding of the theater's position in the early modern material culture,⁴ they find in Shakespeare's Chorus in *Henry V* (1599, 1600) another redefinition of authorization that is seated in the theatrical performance itself, with its attendant emphasis on the power of the audience's "imaginary forces" (1.0.18). In sum, Bruster and Weimann suggest that "it is not too much to see in the reflexive self-probing of the dramatic prologue ... some awareness of the social transformations that would characterize the transition toward an imminent modernity" (154).

Throughout Bruster and Weimann's critical examination of prologues there is an emphasis on the form's liminality, a term which they tie, through its Latin root "limen," to the notion of a "threshold" (37). As noted, the Prologue himself was an apprentice actor on a threshold; additionally, in a role figuratively approximating that of an usher, he guided the audience out of the real world of London and into the fictive world of the play. On a more critical level, the prologue's liminal position facilitates, in their reading, the achievement of Shakespeare's *Henry V* to epitomize a "bi-fold" authority—a term

⁴ Bruster has written extensively about "material culture," a reading of the early modern period as being built upon an understanding of economies of exchange, both monetary and (and more to his point) social. Cf., *Drama in the Market in the Age of Shakespeare*.

borrowed from *Troilus and Cressida*—in its simultaneous expression of textual, poetic mastery and celebration of the audience’s imaginative intervention. On a much larger scale, though, they characterize the performance practices of the early modern theater as being situated on a threshold of its own, creating a “double-bind”: “Although the author textually devises the performed presentation, its provenance is that of a cultural institution attracting socially mixed audiences, expectations, and conventions” (111). In essence, then, Bruster and Weimann survey the historical and critical significance of the prologue-as-threshold through this examination of the form, thus mapping the shifting relationship between the culture and its theater.

Similar to *Prologues to Shakespeare’s Theatre*, my project is concerned with the prologue’s liminality and its relationship to authorship and authorization; however I would like to push the argument that prologues serve as barometers of the changing cultural climate further. Bruster and Weimann, the foremost early modern scholars of cultural materialism and authorship, respectively, helpfully demonstrate that the traces of this cultural change can be gleaned from the period’s prologues. My dissertation argues that, because of these changes over the course of the Elizabethan period, playwrights’ “new sense of self-achievement and intellectual possession” (Bruster and Weimann 77) was acutely affected by the shifting of theatrical, representational authorization; these effects are registered in the plays’ prologic spaces, to be sure, but they also provide keys to understanding prologues as they relate early modern notions of authorship.

“Intellectual possession,” as a term, echoes Joseph Loewenstein’s reference to a late-Elizabethan “encompassing economy in which intellectual possessiveness was

coalescing” (*Author’s Due* 82). Writing in the context of his study of early moderns’ engagement with print and nascent copyright, Loewenstein is offering a rough sketch of his ideas—which he expands in *Jonson and Possessive Authorship*—about playwrights’ reactions to the developing print marketplace. Indeed much of the attention that modern critics pay to playwrights and their plays revolves around discussions of print.⁵ My project is only tangentially interested in what Loewenstein calls “the bibliographic ego” (“Script” 101) epitomized by Ben Jonson, for the rise of the print marketplace happens at the same time as performance practice comes to privilege, in Bruster and Weimann’s reading, the audience’s “imaginary forces.” Theatrical and textual presentations of a playwright’s work represent, to an extent, diametrically opposed modes of authorization: the immediacy of performance is of a different character than the permanence of print.⁶ In focusing more on the encroachment of and reaction to the early modern audience’s imagination, this project is less concerned with Loewenstein’s “possessive authorship”—which gestures toward a kind of ownership during the prehistory of copyright—than it is with the fruitfully more nebulous notion of, to turn Loewenstein’s phrase, authorial possessiveness. To my mind authorial possessiveness, while appropriating some of the force behind Loewenstein’s phrase, has no interest in actual ownership, only the spirit of “possessiveness.” It is akin to what Charles Cathcart refers to as “a sense of writerly responsibility” (366); the authorial possessiveness of which I

⁵ Cf. Loewenstein’s “The Script in the Marketplace,” as well as his other works here cited, but also Peter W. M. Blayney, “The Publication of Playbooks”; Douglas Brooks, *From Playhouse to Printing House*.

⁶ This argument is complicated, of course, by the fact that the only record of these “performances” is in print. Indeed, for a good number of plays there is no evidence that the plays—or, importantly, their prologues—ever saw the stage. Even these prologues, however—Nashe’s *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* or Shakespeare’s *Henry V* Chorus, are examples—perform performance; even if they are only hypothetical, the prologues nonetheless display a playwright’s imagined interaction with his audience.

speak is not located solely in the intellectual (i.e., poetic, artistic) creation of the mind, but instead in the embodiment of that creation on the early modern stage. The company may have owned the play, and the print shop may own it after that; but the play on the stage represented the fruits of the playwright's labor at a time defined by economies of exchange.⁷

I do not want to move too far afield with this reference to economies, only to suggest that the ideas within the prologues were valuable—in terms of exchange, certainly, but also as defensive maneuvers, as personal endorsements, or as cultural critiques—and this sense of value generates the spirit of authorial possessiveness. In this context, then, the concurrence of the emergence of a market for printed plays and the elevation of the audience's imaginative input threatens to absorb the authorially possessive playwright into a matrix of collaborations. An underlying assumption of this project, then, is that the brand of "intellectual possessiveness" that would pit "high astounding terms" against "the jiggling veins of rhyming mother-wits"—to borrow Bruster and Weimann's example of the particularly possessive Christopher Marlowe—almost certainly would have sensed the effects of this inversion of authority in dramatic representation. This is to say that my project does not find, at the end of the Elizabethan period, a resolution in the Shakespearean union of theatrical art and audience's imagination; rather it assumes that the fading prioritization of the playwright leads to a fundamental sense of specifically authorial anxiety.

⁷ Cf. Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare*.

My dissertation examines examples of prologues, inductions, and choruses from early modern drama as means of better understanding dramatists' relationships with the plays they write and the audiences for whom they write them. More than this, though, by studying these prologic spaces we can develop a clearer image of the manner in which playwrights conceptualized and constructed their own relationship to nascent notions of authorship and authority. My project does not consider these spaces simply to be repositories of evidence; I am interested, rather, in the interactions that take place within and around these various prologic forms. Such interactions—between play, playwright, and playgoer—are facilitated by the prologic spaces' intrinsic authority, which provides a space for playwrights to exercise their authorial possessiveness in its various manifestations. (Because these manifestations are as varied as the playwrights themselves, my chapters focus on the dramatists as organizing principles.) Moreover, an intrinsic prologic authority provides something of a rubric perceptible by both playwright and playgoer; this shared "prologic sensibility," if you will, allows us to measure the crucial negotiation with and within the shifting valences of dramatic representation.

A prologic sensibility, however, is contingent upon a broadly conceived notion of "prologics," a term which serves this project as a descriptor for both the ideological function of the prologic space and for the various forms that it takes over the course of the Elizabethan period. A sense of prologic variety can be gleaned from even a brief glance toward Shakespeare: his prologic spaces range from the three-line prologue in Hamlet's version of *The Murder of Gonzago*, to the sonnet-prologue of *Romeo and*

Juliet, to the expansive Chorus in *Henry V*. Such variety in Shakespeare exemplifies playwrights' willingness to test the utility of conventional forms and tropes; but it also contrasts with the continuities that span the period—such as the dependence upon intrinsic authority—thus casting these conventions into sharper relief and making them available to scrutiny. A focus on conventions, the expectations that they breed in audiences, and the dramatists' positions vis-à-vis this interpretational nexus will allow us to develop a categorical sense of early modern prologics. By expanding the typical boundaries of the study of prologues—spanning various genres, auspices of performance, and kinds of prologics—my project hopes to formulate a way of thinking beyond the prologue as just a liminal site of contestation, or more prosaically as an appendage to the thing itself; I hope to develop a way of thinking about the prologic as a hermeneutics unto itself, one which allows us to contextualize more adequately the authorial possessiveness inherent in the early modern period.

Prologic Models

The prologic sensibility that is prevalent in early modern drama has a history that reaches back, in writing and performance, to the rise of English vernacular writing in the late medieval period. Alastair Minnis, for example, traces a medieval literary theory through a study of texts' engagements with *auctors*—ancient writers—and *auctoritas*—the gravitas afforded their work—by way of an academic commentary tradition manifested in prologues. For Minnis, the academic tradition utilizes the prologue as the site from which

the commentator attempted to get to the heart of the problems of interpretation raised by his authoritative text, summarizing the methods of analysis which

would be used throughout the commentary, and outlining the doctrinal issues to be considered in the course of the analysis. The prologue provided a scholar with the occasion to reiterate those received interpretations of the text which seemed most appropriate to him, and to amplify such traditional doctrine with some ideas of his own. (42)

Minnis is writing specifically about biblical commentary in the period, which was itself based on an academic commentary tradition. In this description, though, one can see the commentator taking on the role of interpreting intermediary even with such an authority as the Bible: as he “amplif[ies]” the pertinent “doctrinal issues,” he becomes a reader of his base text. The “ideas of his own” threaten to stand-in for those of the precedent work, even as they profess to frame the *intentio auctoris*, the originary authorial intention. Indeed, as Ruth Evans points out in the context of a slightly longer view of Middle English literary theory, “Rather than be concerned with the author’s individual aims, *intentio*, a prescriptive category, indicates the abstract truth behind a text; in a sense, it thus most closely corresponds not to an inherent property of a work but to a reading practice” (328). The commentator, then, takes on an authorial role of his own by supplying a critical understanding of his *auctor*.

Even when the academic tradition is predicated upon the notion of deference to the source texts, as in *compilatio*, the compiler’s framework becomes the gatekeeper to the compilation. In the *General Prologue* to his *Canterbury Tales*, for example, Chaucer professes to compile the tales of his fellow pilgrims with utter objectivity:

But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,
 That ye n’arrete it nat my vileynye,
 Thogh that I pleyedly speke in this mateere,
 To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
 Ne thogh I speke hir words properly.
 For this ye knowen al so weel as I:

Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
 He moot reherce is ny as evere he kan
 Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
 Al speke he never so rudliche and large,
 Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe,
 Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe. (725-736)⁸

In assuming the mantle of the compiler, Chaucer—or, rather, the “Chaucer” here inscribed—rehearses the responsibilities of “his charge,” chief among them being an incredible degree of accuracy. As with the biblical commentary, however, the pure intentions of the compiler are always already thwarted by the nature of mediation. Indeed, even as Minnis suggests that Chaucer, in his role as “compiler” of the *Canterbury Tales* was not “interested in presenting himself as a ‘modern author,’” he nonetheless “was an author who hid behind the ‘shield and defence’ of the compiler” (209-10). This is to say that, although he did not assert his own authorial position vis-à-vis his “sources”—and in fact wholeheartedly defers to them—“the way in which he seems to have transferred the compiler’s technique of authenticating sources to his ‘sources’, the Canterbury pilgrims” demonstrates “Chaucer’s exploitation of the principles of *compilatio*” (202). This manipulation of the academic commentary tradition displays, then, a specifically authorial predilection for novel redesigns of old models.

This particular exploitation in the *Canterbury Tales* is especially pointed in a moment when the English vernacular is vying for legitimacy with Latin. Read in this context, Chaucer’s shift in priorities from the *auctor* to the “sondry folk” (25) marks an

⁸ A paraphrase of this passage: “I pray of your courtesy that you do not account it villainy [i.e., rudeness] if I speak plainly in this matter (of telling you their words and their cheer) although [i.e., because] I speak their words accurately. You know as well as I: whoever retells a man’s tale must rehearse [i.e., repeat] every word as nearly he can if he has been charged to do so, even if he [the re-teller] does not generally speak so rudely and freely; otherwise [to differ] he would be untruthful in his retelling, or be making things up, or using new words [i.e., not those expressed by the tale’s source].”

associated attempt to validate the vernacular English tongue in which they speak.⁹ Rita Copeland traces this strain of Chaucerian manipulation into his *Legend of Good Women*, itself a compilation, the *Prologue* to which offers “Chaucer’s most sustained examination of vernacular authorship” (186). The premise of the *Prologue* is that the God of Love chastises the poet for his illiberal representations of love, an exchange mediated by a third figure, Alceste. As may be assumed, the poet necessarily defends his work (with the aid of the mediator): he cites his *Troilus and Criseyde* and his translation of Jean de Meun’s and Guillaume de Lorris’s *Roman de la Rose*, noting that

...what so myn auctour mente,
 Algate, God woot, yt was myn entente
 To forthren trouthe in love and yt cheryce,
 And to ben war fro falsnesse and fro vice
 By swich ensample; this was my menyng. (F text, 470-74)¹⁰

Chaucer frames his own “menyng” as being distinctly independent of “what so myn auctour mente.” This is to cite but one instance in which we see Chaucer manipulating academic models in the *Prologue* as he does in *Canterbury Tales*. Accordingly, Copeland frames her discussion of the *Prologue* in terms similar to those of Minnis:

The academic language of the *Prologue* serves two related purposes. First, it identifies vernacular writing with the language of official culture, thus conferring this cultural privilege on Chaucer’s English text. But in so inserting his vernacular writings into this academic critical discourse Chaucer also directs exegesis away from the *auctores* to his own texts. In applying these exegetical techniques to his own *Legend* he claims the status of *auctour*, thus constituting his translations as *auctoritates*. (186)

⁹ This should not be confused with a democratic uprising of any sort; Chaucer still wrote for—and worked within—an elite, literate class.

¹⁰ A paraphrase of this passage: “Whatever my *auctor* meant, surely (God knows) it was my *entente* [authorial intention, cf., Evans “Notion,” 328] to further [the message of] truth in love and to cherish it, and to be wary of falseness and vice in such examples; that was my meaning.”

Whether or not Chaucer “claims the status of *auctour*” is secondary to the governing sense that, in both the *Prologue* to the *Legends of Good Women* and the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer seeks to transfer the gravitas of *auctorial* work onto his vernacular frame. His prologic spaces, then, exemplify a late medieval investment in exercising distinctly authorial interests and mechanisms in their defensiveness and formal innovation.

I limit my examples here to Chaucer, and though he may have been one of the most innovative in his authorial uses of his prologic spaces—and, certainly for the modern critic, the most recognized—he was not the only writer. One need only glance at the contents of Minnis’s anthology—edited with A. Brian Scott and David Wallace—of *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, or the later anthology of “Middle English literary theory,” *The Idea of the Vernacular*, to note the proliferation of writers who use their prologues as the sites in which to engage their *auctorial* forebears and to theorize their literary present. While they differed in kind and tone, the editors of *The Idea of the Vernacular*, for example, are still able to generalize that, “in annexing Latin’s cultural authority” in the interest of the vernacular, these writers asserted more than a self-reflexive prologic sensibility: “Middle English writers often seem to have been more concerned with the projected audience of a text—with the kind of *community* that writing in English could make or sustain—than with the furthering of English literature” (322, emphasis in the original). Put another way, as “English writing” shifted toward writing in English, the prologic spaces played an integral role in mediating the transition for the readers. In imbuing his pilgrims’ tales with a sense of *auctoritas* previously

reserved for classical texts or the Bible, Chaucer's works, and his prologues specifically, reflect this cultural shift.

While one influence on early modern drama, early English prose is not the only influence. As we shall see in Chapter II, the early interludes especially drew upon the work of Terence and Plautus. In *Jack Juggler* (1555, 1562?), for example, a translation of a Plautine comedy, the prologue seeks authorization by deference to "old comedie," but also indicates that, though the play is full of "mirth and game," it is the vein which "conteine[s] mutch wisdome and teache prudent pollecie" (A2r). Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* (1552, 1566?), perhaps the first English comedy, pays homage to his Roman forebears in similar terms:

The wyse Poets long time heretofore,
Under merrie Comedies secretes did declare,
Wherein was contained very vertuous lore,
With mysteries and forewarnings very rare.
Suche to write neither Plautus nor Terence dyd spare,
Whiche among the learned at this day beares the bell:
These with such other therein dyd excel. (A2r)

To be sure, their merit as comic playwrights would have been acknowledged by Udall's humanist-educated courtly audience just as it would have been to the scholarly audience of *Jack Juggler*; he accentuates, however, the "vertuous lore" secreted away within these comedies. It is perhaps to Udall's credit that scholarly audiences would have known these Roman writers: as a schoolmaster he published a Latin grammar, *Flowres for Latine Speaking Selected and Gathered out of Terence*, which was printed in one form or another in seven editions between 1534 and 1581. Terence and his predecessor, then, would have been in the minds of the audiences of early English plays such as *Roister*

Doister and *Jack Juggler* as paragons of comedy but also, increasingly, as *auctores* to be heeded.

These comedians' uses of prologues may have held sway in the early days of organized English drama as well. In his study of the form, G. S. Bower differentiates between Plautus's and Terence's methods of prologic expression, characterizing the former's as "frequently, but not always" a "simple introductory element" while the latter's are almost exclusively "occupied with other matters, more personal to the poet or the principal actor" (36.n). The divide in Bower's classification marks a difference in adhering to theatrical decorum and challenging it. In her study of Terence's twin prologues to *Hecyra* (*The Mother-in-Law*), Ismene Lada-Richards affirms Bower's sense that Terence was invested in the expression of authorial concerns in his prologues as she argues that his prologues were highly rhetorical in nature and, more pointedly,

Terence's text [the prologues to *Hecyra*] amounts to a defiant declaration of authorial pride, a gesture of identity construction and, last but not least, a calculated act of theatrical self-definition. [...] Terence's persistent foregrounding of the havoc wreaked upon his art by a hodge-podge of lowbrow entertainments and the crowd's response to them defines by implication his own ideal of genteel spectatorship and subtle, elevated spectacle. (60-61)

Insofar as the prologue represents an inherently authorial space, it follows that Terence, in Lada-Richards's reading, would put his prologic spaces to such "defiant" and "calculated" authorial uses in a manner similar to that which we will see in Elizabethan drama. Moreover, the classed terms that she deploys in her characterization of Terence resonate sharply for the early modern critic. It may come as no surprise, then, that her work draws out the continuity between Terentian comedy and English drama in terms of this the separation between "genteel spectatorship" and "a hodge-podge of lowbrow

entertainments” and, in the process, refers to Ben Jonson as an occasional signpost. (In her characterization there also is an echo of Lyly’s lament for the changing times in his *Midas* prologue, which declares that “the whole worlde is become an Hodge-podge” [1.0.19-20].) Part of her project is to follow issues of theatrical taste and decorum into the eighteenth century and, accordingly, she only stops briefly in the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries, but her suggestion that the likes of David Garrick and John Dryden face the same issues of prologic framing as Terence rings equally true for playwrights of the moment in which the English stage is in its nascence.

Early Modern Prologics

The foregoing holds no claims to being a comprehensive examination of the prologic tradition that predated Elizabethan drama; I have attempted simply to demonstrate some of the foundational aspects of prologics that would have been inherited by the early moderns. Nor am I suggesting that early modern writers and audiences were well-versed in these examples; although many may have known Chaucer or Plautus, I use them here as examples in an effort to paint a landscape of the prologic, the varying tones of which continue to color the early modern conceptions of its form and function. Indeed, the notion of a prologic sensibility is intentionally general, for in using a broad lens I hope, perhaps paradoxically, to provide a much more acute focus on prologic authority: the understanding of prologic conventions and expectations that is shared by playwrights and audiences enables this study to focus on the interactions that take place within dramatic prologic spaces.

These interactions, moreover, are colored not only by an authorial anxiety predicated upon the interpreting audience, but an anxiety that is endemic to the playwright as such. As Katharine Maus argues in her *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, early modern playwrights face a “crisis of authenticity” that stems from the “perverse” exposure of the dramatic endeavor as artifice in a moment when “truth is imagined to be inward and indivisible” (32). “Inwardness,” in Maus’s formulation, is an ideal of truth that becomes self-negating as it is translated into a theatrical context that is necessarily based on outward expression. In essence, there can be no truth in the theater and such a “crisis of authenticity” presents a distinct set of challenges for playwrights who, as I argue below, want to demonstrate the inherent merit of their work and their theater.

Compounding authorial anxiety in the period is the collaborative nature of play production in the early modern period. Since G. E. Bentley’s *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare’s Time* we have come to understand, as Bentley argues, “Every performance in the commercial theatres from 1590 to 1642 was itself essentially a collaboration: it was the joint accomplishment of dramatists, actors, musicians, costumers, prompters (who made alterations in the original manuscript) and—at least in the later theatres—of managers” (198). In the years following Bentley’s study, critics have fruitfully complicated this model in their examinations of printing house practices and the mediation of publishers, printers, and compositors in how we come to know a given “play.”¹¹ If we add to this already convoluted formula the audience’s interpretive

¹¹ Cf., Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication*.

intervention in plays, the dramatist becomes but one point on a vast matrix of theatrical creation. With so many disparate voices resonating through the creative process, it is easy to lose sight of the playwright's role. As I am arguing, these playwrights nonetheless retained a sense of their authorial possessiveness. Playwrights are in constant negotiation with these myriad intervening forces, attempting to give a voice to their stake in the dramatic process. This authorial possessiveness is consistently manifested in the plays' prologic spaces, for not only is this space a historical locus of authority, but also, in the context of the performed play, it is the last vestige of space available to the dramatist to voice his or her "writerly responsibility" before the play is given over to the subjective predilections of the audience.

This sense of responsibility for their work leads, in the interlude tradition specifically, to an added sense of the dramatists' responsibility *with* their work. As I will argue in Chapter II, the interludes demonstrate an interpolation of the didactic, (most often) religious roots of drama in their insistence upon plays' matter. Of course, on the one hand these dramatists are deploying the conventional prologic tropes: in the *Canterbury Tales*, for example, Chaucer is keen, like Plautus and Terence, to strike the important balance between "sentence" and "solaas," or, as the interludes frame it, between matter and mirth. On the other hand, however, this rhetorical trope attempts to legitimate the dramatic enterprise as a valuable undertaking. This is the era of such controlling measures as, for example, the *Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds* (1572), which classified players as "Roges Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars" and had the effect of regulating itinerant acting troupes by affixing them to "a Baron or honorable personage

of greater degree” (Chambers, *Elizabethan* 4.269). Not only the players, but those who would consort with them were implicated as well: in advocating a one-year ban of plays in London and within a three-mile radius, Edmund Grindel, Bishop of London at Paul's, in February of 1564 decries “common players” who “set up batles, whereunto the youth resorteth excessively and there taketh infection” (qtd. in Yungblut 85). The “infection” of which Grindel speaks is as moral as it is bodily, for entertainments corrupted the hearts and minds of youth just as much as they created a breeding pit for opportunistic illnesses like the plague (and when one considers that the plague was thought, at least to the Puritan mind, to be a manifestation of God’s wrath, the distance between “moral” and “bodily” harm is considerably contracted). The interlude dramatists, then, while their work was generally sanctioned and somewhat protected by “honorable personages,” nevertheless were charged with producing plays that were shaded, by their nature, with the pall of suspicion.

Under these darkened circumstances, the inclination to assert—and, as I will argue, construct—the moral and cultural value of their plays was a matter of course. Appropriately, one can trace this defensive rhetoric through the prologic spaces of these interludes. More than simply making rhetorical arguments about their plays’ worth, though, the interlude dramatists directly engage their audience’s reception of drama. Dramatists encourage this understanding of the works’ inherent “matter” and, even more insistently, manufacture their auditors’ performance of a quiet, measured contemplation through the rhetorical invocation of silence. We shall see that silence functions not only as a sign of contemplative engagement but also as a mechanism for control: the

performance of silence, if you will, is subject to aural and visual regulation, not just by the authorial prologic figure but by one's fellow auditors as well.

The turn to the prologues of John Lyly in Chapter III is a turn to a time in which drama has gained considerably more legitimacy, owed in part to the establishment of designated theater spaces within the city itself. Lyly, then, is less inclined to construct the worth of his dramatic endeavors than he is to construct his worth as a dramatist. Before he turned his efforts to plays in the early 1580s, Lyly had won considerable renown as the author of his two *Euphues* works in the late 1570s. These long prose narratives—considered by Lyly's early twentieth-century editor, R. Warwick Bond, to be the first English novels—resembled the courtesy manuals of the period, giving detailed accounts of life at court, both good and ill. More than their content, though, their style created Lyly's renown: dubbed “euphuism” by his contemporaries, their prose was marked by attention to rhetorical structures and an overly constructed, overtly stylized form. Lyly transferred his rhetorical style to his plays, which were written for Elizabeth's court, no doubt capitalizing on the success of *Euphues*. It is in his plays—and particularly in his various prologues—where we can see Lyly laboring to construct his authorial persona. Over the course of the chapter I trace this manifestation of Lyly's authorial possessiveness through his career, comparing it to the way in which he constructs himself in his correspondence with powerful figures such as Robert Cecil, Elizabeth's Secretary, and the Queen herself. In considering his prologic oeuvre in the context of these highly rhetorical letters, we can see Lyly's efforts to establish himself as a humble courtier worthy of a position at court: namely, as Master of the Revels.

In both the interlude tradition and in Lyly we see how the intrinsic authorial nature of the prologic space is used for distinctly authorial ends: in the former, prologic authority is deployed in the interest of legitimizing plays as such, while in the latter it is used to legitimize the figure of the playwright. In examining Shakespeare's uses of the prologic space—my task in Chapter IV—we see a playwright who displaces the vantage point of prologic authority onto his audience. Shakespeare relies heavily upon a shared prologic sensibility to turn his audience's expectation of prologic convention on its head. My chapter begins by reading the ways in which Shakespeare's inset prologues—primarily the prologue for *Hamlet's* inset play *The Murder of Gonzago* and that for the *Pyramus and Thisbe* playlet acted by the “rude mechanicals” in *Midsummer Night's Dream*—provide keys to understanding the uses of prologues in his own plays. These inset prologues demonstrate an engaged, interactive, and interpreting auditory that, I suggest, is precisely the kind of ideal audience that Shakespeare imagined for *Romeo and Juliet*, *2 Henry IV*, and *Henry V*; hence, I examine these plays' prologues as sites of the specific interaction between the authorially possessive playwright and his audience. Through this examination we see that, for all of his formal prologic variety, Shakespeare is consistently interested in a “prologic agitation” that challenges the audience's expectations and tests the boundaries of their interpretive agency. This agitation is an exercise that on the one hand recognizes the power of the audience's “imaginary forces”—in what Bruster and Weimann label as the epitome of the prologic “bi-fold authority”—and, on the other hand, turns that interpretive imperative into a responsibility: as the audience develops into a primary locus of authorization in the

theater, Shakespeare requires that they interrogate their relationship to plays and, more broadly, to the nature of historically constructed narratives.

In the progression of the Elizabethan period we can trace the audience's increased interpretive agency, from constructed pupils in the interlude tradition to the responsible co-makers of plays' meanings in Shakespeare, and it is this progression that produces a specifically authorial anxiety in Thomas Nashe, the subject of my final chapter. Nashe's one extant play, *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, an occasional play celebrating the change from summer to fall and the year's harvest, is an exceptional metadrama. At its root the play is about the process by which Summer, nearing death, will bequeath his legacy; the underlying action of the play consists of his officers—Autumn, Winter, and their cohorts—coming before Summer to account for their uses (and misuses) of resources. This plot, however, is stripped of its primacy by Toy, the actor who plays the Prologue. Chapter V argues that this brand of usurpation is a manifestation of Nashe's anxiety over the interpretive intervention of the audience. By reading *Summer's Last Will* alongside Nashe's prose works, and with an eye specifically to his use of marginalia, we can see that throughout his career Nashe struggles with the fundamental fact that his work, under the scrutiny of others, takes on a new identity that is not altogether of his making. It is not, therefore, that Nashe's anxiety merely is manifested *in* the expansive prologic space of *Summer's Last Will*—Toy and his interventions are interwoven into the very fabric of the entire play—but rather *with* this prologic space Nashe constructs a version of the threat that the interpreting audience poses for the playwright. This particular manifestation of authorial anxiety is not unique

to Nashe: this is the same brand of anxiety with which Ben Jonson constantly struggles over the course of career. Jonson's answer, however, is to turn to the printing house, a move which would take my project beyond its necessarily limited scope: I am interested in what Barbara Johnson calls a "theatrical authorship." Nashe, then, will have to provide the bookend to this examination of the interaction between authors and audiences in the early modern prologic space.

CHAPTER II

“SILENCE IN ALL EARES BENT I PLAYNLY DOE ESPIE”:

SILENCE AND PROLOGIC MANIPULATION IN ELIZABETHAN INTERLUDES

Damon and Pythias (1564, 1571) is the only extant interlude¹ by Richard Edwards, a courtier, poet, and dramatist and Master of the Children of the Chapel during the early years of Elizabeth’s reign. Although only one exemplar of his dramatic endeavors survives, Edwards appears to have been prominent enough that his masques and interludes garnered royal audiences: for example, his *Palamon and Arcite*, which survives only as a bit of theater lore, was performed at the conclusion of the Queen’s progress at Oxford in 1566. Edwards was charged with preparations for the elaborate staging of the interlude, overseeing the preparations of costumes, the enlistment of participants, and the design of the playspace’s structures. On the evening of the first scheduled performance—the interlude was designed to be played in two parts, one night apart—audiences crowded in to see the Queen—and the play—clambering onto the large scaffold that had been erected in the Hall for the performance.² Their added weight

¹ As a generic descriptor, “interlude” has not been very useful because, as Chambers points out, the term might “apply primarily to any kind of dramatic performance whatever” (*Mediaeval* 2:183). Similarly, Bevington notes that “the widespread use of the term cannot be challenged” (9). Exemplifying the term’s nebulous nature, Southern, is content to group everything from the earliest forms of Tudor performances—e.g., *Mankind*, *Fulgens and Lucrece*—to the comedies later in the period—e.g., *Jack Juggler*—as an “interlude.” Southern appears to rely, though, on generic distinctions expressed in the plays themselves or on their title pages: he classifies *Damon and Pythias*, for example, as a “tragical comedy” and *Tom Tyler*, very generally, as a “play,” both of which terms are those used in the prologues to these plays. In this chapter I use the term in this chapter in the spirit of its general application to dramatic performances prior to the organized theater.

² Southern (413-23), recounting “the problem of university staging” discusses humble scaffolds. Nelson (59-67) details a rather elaborate scaffold structure—“made up of some five hundred pieces of timber” (59)—at Queen’s College, Cambridge.

stressed the structure, collapsing a side wall that killed three and injuring five playgoers (King 78-79).³ In spite of this calamity, however, the first show went on. Not to be upstaged by the catastrophe of two nights prior, the second part of the performance featured a pyrotechnic show and involved a staging of Arcite's funeral pyre, including the symbolic burning of a cloak that, presumably, the actor playing Arcite had worn. A previous owner of the cloak, however, had been Edward VI, prompting the intervention of an audience member who was reportedly allayed by the Queen herself (King 83).

It may be fortunate for *Damon and Pythias* that no comparable record of its staging and performance is extant, for no account could provide the high drama of *Palamon and Arcite's* staging for the Queen.⁴ The title page to *Damon and Pythias* provides some information about its staging, however, by noting that the former was "shewed before the Queenes Majestie, by the Children of her Graces Chappell." As Master of the Chapel and the children players it would have been in Edwards's charge to put on numerous such interludes, a fact which leads King, for example, to believe that Edwards was an influential dramatist even in spite of a dearth of extant work. His prevalence may be affirmed by his influence on later English dramatists, not least of whom, in King's estimation, was Shakespeare, whose *2 Henry IV* and inset *Pyramus and Thisbe* from *Midsummer Night's Dream* satirize Edwards's style (81). In addition to his dramatic legacy, Edwards's poetry survives in manuscript and in print in the miscellany *The Paradise of Dainty Devises*. Printed in 1576 and in eight editions through 1606, the

³ King (78-9) admirably pieces together the details of these events in his *The Works of Richard Edwards*, from which my information derives (70-84). Citations from Edwards, unless otherwise indicated, will be from this edition.

⁴ Records suggest that it was performed during the Christmas season of 1564 and again at Lincoln's Inn the following year.

collection appears to have been one of the more popular ones at the height of the early modern period. In spite of sparse evidence of his work, then, Edwards appears to have been popular and influential.

Returning for a moment to the ill-omened *Palamon and Arcite*, we might imagine the sensory effects of the crowded playing space: the size of the scaffold structures, the elaborate costumes, the smells of the food and of the gathered masses. In this chapter I am interested in the sonic landscape of early interludes such as Edwards's; or, rather, in interrogating the nature of silence in the context of these interludes. If the anecdotal evidence for *Palamon and Arcite* is any indication, interludes staged at the universities, for example, had the potential to draw significant crowds, and during festival occasions—which often provided the context for such plays—it is hard to imagine that the volume and type of audience that would overwhelm a scaffold structure would restrain their voices.⁵ In his study of the early modern soundscape, Bruce Smith posits that the Prologue was located in center of this sensory environment and his role was “to clear the air and command the stage” (275), and the need to clear the air bespeaks a noisy playspace. Although his is an investigation of the later Shakespearean stage, Andrew Gurr's list of distractions at a dramatic event—“the weather, food and drink, smells, noise, cutpurses, and occasionally riots” (*Playgoing* 35)—may be instructive as well: in the very least the sensory aspects here listed (food, drink, smells, and noise) are very likely to have applied to the kind of environmental elements competing with an interlude for audience attention. As Gurr has demonstrated, playgoers

⁵ Drawing upon first-hand accounts, King notes that “[John] Bereblock characteristically stresses the strength and solidity of the college building and blames the plebes for causing a foul scuffle” (78-79).

went to hear plays and not to see them (82); spectacle, on the organized stage, was the domain of clowns and their jigs. As some of the pre-theater prologues attests, this accentuation of hearing was present in the interlude tradition as well: in Lupton's *All for Money* (1577, 1578) the prologue beseeches "In hearing us attentively we crave but your ayde" (A2v); *New Custom* (1571, 1583) promises to begin the play "if of patience you list to attende" (A2v); and *Pedlar's Prophecy* (1561, 1595) apologizing for an overlong prologue, "Beseech[es] you to heare the rest [of the play] with patience" (A3r). If hearing is the predominant sense in the theater, then clearing the air would have been of the utmost importance, and while we might assume that a performance at court might require an elevated sense of decorum, especially in the presence of the regent, the accounts of *Palamon and Arcite* suggest the opposite: it was the presence of the Queen, in part, that had caused the throngs to bring down the house.

It is in this context that we should consider the opening lines of *Damon and Pythias*'s prologue: "On everie side, whereas I glaunce my roving eye, / Silence in all eares bent playnly I doe espie" (1.0.1-2). A prologic opening that purports to observe an already-rapt audience seems somewhat disingenuous given the likelihood that they, instead, were loud and boisterous. The invocation of silence, however, may point to an alternative rhetorical purpose. In the case of *Damon and Pythias* we know that Edwards was a known writer; as such, his assertion of an engaged auditory could very well be a self-indulgent, authorial construction of his audience. This is to say that, riding his ego into the prologue, Edwards may suggest that the audience is hanging on his every word in anticipation of the play to come. Indeed, as the prologue continues it rehearses

Edwards's résumé as a writer of court masques, noting that "our Author's Muse, that masked in delight" has inspired a new direction: "no more such sports to write" (1.0.7-8). Having "forst his Penne against his kynd" (1.0.8), the prologue—again alluding to a sense of Edwards's popularity—warns playgoers that "if your egre looks doe long such toyes to see, / As heretofore Commycal wise, were wont abroade to bee: / Your lust is lost" (1.0.3-5). Grouping the initial suggestion of silence with the "lust" in the auditors (presumed) "egre looks," we can see that this ostensible silence serves as one of a handful of means to the rhetorical ends of constructing the auditors' anticipation of "toyes" or masques. Furthermore, in alluding to a sense of expectation, here thwarted by the playwright's turn to "a Tragicall Commedie" (1.0.38), the prologue suggests that the audience was familiar with Edwards's usual "kynd" of writing.

Edwards's pointedly rhetorical use of silence as an opening gesture is rare in the period; the typical request for silence appears at the end of a prologue as a more insistent way to "clear the air" before the beginning of the interlude proper. *Tom Tyler and His Wife* (1578, 1661) bids the audience "to make them [the actors] room, and silence as you may, / Which being done, they shall come in and play" (17-18). Also, in a concluding gesture, the prologues to *Godly Susanna* (1569, 1578) and *King Darius* (1565-1565) "crave" and "desire" silence, respectively, as their vice figures prepare to enter. As noted, these calls for silence seem to be conventional means of quieting the playspace in preparation for the play proper. However *Damon and Pythias*'s opening complicates this apparent convention. As the prologue makes doubly clear, the audience's silence registers visually: he "espie[s]" it with his "roving eye." The point is compounded by the

eye/espie couplet that emphasizes the vocalic /ī/ or “eye.” The fact that silence, in this construction, is visual intimates that it is also subject to surveillance by the Prologue and by others in the playspace, a point to which I will return later in the chapter. First, however, I would like to examine how the prologic construction of the audience’s silence arises from a cultural imperative for quiet engagement with didactic material; hence the prologues express a contingent desire to frame interludes as matters of intellectual, moral, and spiritual value. As shall become clear, the invocation of silence is a rhetorical prologic gesture designed to elicit a performance of rapt engagement by the audience, a performance that can be registered visually (as Edwards demonstrates) and thus regulated.

The Rhetoric of Silence

The depths to which the period’s rhetoric of silence extend may be plumbed in some of the rhetorical treatises of the period. Anthony Munday’s translation of Giacomo Affinati’s *Dumbe Divine Speaker* (1605), for example, in the prefatory remarks “yeelding a reason for the title of his booke,” notes that man’s fallen nature all but precludes the likelihood that one can speak well: “it is much better to keepe silence, then to talke, in regard of the numberlesse offenses, that men do fall into by their tongues only. [...] For great joy have they that keep silence, because thereby they offend not god, but in their silence they do alwaies contemplate their cheefeste happiness, and (even as in safe harbour) have perpetual quietnesse” (A3r-A3v). Affinati tells us that to speak divinely is a privileged position, but it would be best to simply keep one’s mouth shut, for in doing so one signals that he or she is demonstrating an inner contemplation of

“theire cheefeste happiness,” which is to say, they are contemplating God. Similarly, Thomas Wright’s *Passions of the Mind* (1604), a text predicated upon the idea that one can read an individual’s inner thoughts through his or her outward expressions, tells his reader that “wise men count this extreame [that is, “taciturnitie”] more secure; for many wordes almost ever offend, but silence rarely” (M4r). For Wright, it is not a matter of spiritual preservation but of personal security. Although both of these accounts fall later in the early modern period, both link silence with a sense of safety in one’s self-presentation; one is less likely to offend—God in the former, fellow man in the latter—if one lives by an abiding silence.

As in Munday’s *Affinati*, the popular emblem books of the period regard silence as a contemplative gesture. In the extant examples based on various editions of Andrea Alciati’s germinal emblem book, including Geoffrey Whitney’s *Choice of Emblemes* (1586), the emblematic representation of “silence” offers as its woodcut an image of the scholar at work in his study, observing a contemplative silence. In an image familiar to all from childhood (and parental) experience, the scholar marks his silence with a finger to his lips, a signal which harkens back to Harpocrates, the Roman representative of silence. Citing biblical and classical precedent, Whitney, like both Wright and *Affinati*, advocates a default silent mode; as Simonides says, “my wordes repentance had, / But Silence yet, did never make me sad” (Whitney 60). The emblem’s epigram is one of the longest in all of *Choice*, and as one might expect from an emblem tagged with the motto “Silentium,” it insists upon reminding the reader to weigh the dangers of speaking against the relative safety of silence, as “the tongue, althowghe it bee a member small, /

Of man it is best, or worste of all” (61). However, in tying this discourse on the virtues of silence to an image of the scholar in his study—a connection that is prevalent in all of the period’s emblem books that offer such an example—the emblem additionally marks silence as the domain of the scholar, contemplating (like Affinati’s Godly man) his vocation. This contemplative, silent reading is an aspect that we moderns take for granted—as did early moderns, for that matter—but it is a tradition linked to antiquity: as Augustine noted of Ambrose upon visiting him in Milan, “when he read, his eyes scanned the page and his heart sought out the meaning, but his voice was silent and his tongue was still.”⁶ The silently engaged Ambrose, then, provides the model that one sees depicted emblematically over twelve hundred years later: the silent scholar, taking the matter of his texts to heart.⁷

It is in this context that I would like to situate the rhetorical use of silence in some of the Elizabethan interludes; first, though, it is necessary to focus the critical lens through which we have viewed these interludes. The didactic nature of these dramatic endeavors has long been a point of reference for scholars of the form. Certainly topicality has been shown to be at the heart of Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton’s *Gorbuduc* (1562, 1565), one of the earliest examples of English drama. The interlude adds a voice to the chorus of courtiers and politicians concerned with the newly anointed Elizabeth’s lack of progeny; its depiction of a civil war precipitated by an unclear line of

⁶ Quoted in Manguel, *A History Of Reading* (50).

⁷ The emblem book was itself something of a courtesy manual, a point supported by H. S.’s *Mirroure of Majestie* (1618), which is a collection of emblems ostensibly directed toward various state figures including the Prince and papist authorities. Thus, insofar as these woodcut images are designed to model such things as the “Uxoriarū virtutes,” we might take them as, if not genuine representations of individuals, at least idealized images.

succession provided a clear call from an anxious culture, torn twice-over in recent years by matters of succession and religious upheaval. *Gorboduc*, for example, implied that the Queen might heed the play's advice, marry, and produce a suitable heir to the English throne. The interlude was topical, to be sure, but it was also didactic in its emphasis on a significant party line in Elizabeth's reign, the proponents of which included even the Queen's closest advisors, the Secretary of State William Cecil and the courtier Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

The period's drama did not have to be topical, nor did it need to have such a royal audience in order to be didactic. Indeed most of the interludes' prologues frame their content as instructional. The anonymous interlude *Nice Wanton* (1550, 1560) is a prodigal son story, the prologue to which implies not only the import of its basis in scripture but also the homiletic lesson that parents should discipline their children. This discipline is in keeping with the typically hierarchical design of the family and of the family's position in the hegemonic matrix of order: duty to parents is likened to duty to the regent, hence duty to God. Thus, this is a parable used to espouse domestic and civic order. Symmetrically divided, the first half of the prologue speaks generally about the maintenance of control over one's children, a matter which "her in thys Interlude, ye shall se playne" (A1v). The deictic point of reference brings a certain immediacy to the pending performance of the latter half of the prologue, as it provides a conventional outline of the interlude's plot. In summarizing a mother's tragic fall and redemption, the prologue implies that the audience, by way of this performed parable, will come to understand the necessity of discipline to the welfare of the family and to civil order. A

similar dramatized parable is also at work in the prologue to *Jacob and Esau* (1554, 1568), in which the first two-thirds of the twenty-four line prologue recount the biblical matter as “in the Booke of Genesis it is expressed” (A1v)⁸. The final third of the play turns to the performance of the play, “whereby God’s adoption [of Jacob] may appeare,” but also whereby one might learn “that what ever Gods ordinaunce was, / nothing might defeate, but that it muste come to passe.” Here, as in *Nice Wanton*, we see the revelation of the plot of the play coupled with a guiding idea about the general lesson that one should take from it; in both examples, heeding God’s lessons, as demonstrated in Biblical source material, is crucial to one’s well being.

Even with the insistences of such gravity of matter, it is worth reiterating that these were festive events. As the title page to *Jacob and Esau* tells us, it is “A new mery and wittie / Comedie or Enterlude” and its auspices in a patron’s Great Hall (Southern 363) imply that this play, as was typical, occasioned celebration (or, rather, was itself a part of an occasional celebration). In this regard it is not unlike *Nice Wanton*’s performance by boys at court (Southern 354). Surely the audience would have been in a festive mood, especially if they were coming from or processing to dinner. The context, then, necessitates a reminder that the interludes’ matter should balance their mirth. In these interludes the injection of didacticism is a way of justifying the play, and the prologues therefore construct of a way of interpreting their plays. Speaking with the force of an intrinsic prologic authority, the Prologue uses his sway to impress upon the audience the importance of the lesson they are about to receive. Of course biblical

⁸ All citations from *Jacob and Esau* will be from this page in the quarto.

lessons had been a part of drama since the origins of the form in English, so these prologues may appear to be mere conventions, but even if this claim to edifying biblical history is lip-service, it nonetheless implies that the responsible auditor will glean some matter from this mirth. The prologue reiterates the fact that they are gathered together for this performance—as on any day—to do God’s work, a point which may easily have been overlooked in the context of such festivity.

The imperative to do God’s work also implies the audience’s corresponding proficiency in interpreting the plays as parables. Leah Marcus frames early modern audiences as deft analogical thinkers who “regularize and elevate topical issues so that they could be linked with more abstract moral concerns” (41). Although the milieu of her study is the established public theater and, accordingly, her “topicality” is of a variety that includes, like *Gorboduc*, political or cultural analogs in the drama, the ability to recognize and process “more abstract moral concerns” resonates in these morally-inclined interludes. *Jacob and Esau* and *Nice Wanton* demonstrate that the prologues were charged with the task of encouraging audiences’ interpretation of the material for spiritual and cultural edification. Indeed, given that both of these interludes’ prologues frame their plays as parables denotes an inherent connection to scripture; or, more precisely, to a kind of interpretation that is anticipated by the engagement with biblical narratives. The importance of this kind of active engagement, implied by the interludes’ content and enforced by the prologic imperative, is a central feature of interludes’ prologic project.

We can see the centrality of the didactic impulse in its apparent availability to satire in such apparently blithe schoolboy comedies as *Jack Juggler* (1555, 1562?), which creates a parable of its own:

For except the husbandman suffer his grounde
Sum tymes to rest, it wol bere no frute verament
Therefore they lett the filde lye, everie second yeare
To the end that after rest, it may the better corne beare. (A1v)

Instead of providing a structure for moral or social edification, *Jack Juggler*'s prologue espouses the virtues of "honest mirth and pastime" (A1v) through the analogy of the farmer who gives his fields a rest so that they might yield "better corne." The prologue's use of the conventional parable subverts the form's typical, overtly didactic messages. Such pointed distancing echoes the first lines of the prologue in which the audience's first encounter with the play is a Latin phrase: "Interpone tuis intergum gaudia curis/ Ut possis animo quemues suffere laborem" (A1v). Of course the very use a Latin phrase signals a didactic, scholarly intent, one that may have been an arresting opening to the play that promised on its title page to be "both wytte [witty], and very pleyasant." These lines give the appearance of a lesson, one buttressed by the prologue's subsequent question: "Doo any of you knowe what latine is this / Or else wold you have, an expositorem / To declare it in Engliyshe, per sensum planiorem[?]" (A1v). The prologue is just as quick, however, to defuse the scholastic thrust of the opening by undermining the preceding lines' Latin didacticism, declaring that "It is best I speake Englishe, or ells with in a whylle / I may percase [perchance] myne owne selfe, with my latin begile" (A1v). At its outset—and later in the parable of the farmer and field—the prologue to

Jack Juggler affirms its commitment to mirth at the expense of the interludes' typical prologic didacticism.

On one hand this commitment is a validation of the festive side the interludes' provenance. On the other hand, though, the Prologue seems, in spite of his efforts, unable to escape the form's intrinsic didacticism. In answering his own question, the Prologue reveals that the Latin opening originates "in the boke of Cato the wyse" (A1v). Even in defusing the seriousness with which the prologue opens, the speaker uses the opportunity as a teaching point. The Latin opening, then, still relies upon a constructed hegemonic relationship between teacher and student. Utilizing the prologic space for this maneuver further demonstrates the site's intrinsic authority as it establishes the ostensible teacher's position over the pupil. This relationship, we might imagine, implicitly requests the type of silent engagement required in the classroom. This didact-student relationship is compounded by the later references to Cato (A1v, A2r) and subsequent references to Ovid (A1v), Cicero (A2r), and "ye pylosophers, Plutarke, Socrates [and] Plato" (A2r); the prologue, even as it confirms mirthful intentions, makes reference to classical sources to substantiate these claims.

The fact that his source texts are specifically not scriptural may allow the Prologue more freedom to toy with the audience's anticipation of learned intentions. He notes that "this maker" of *Jack Juggler* took "the ground thereof out of Plautus first comedie, / And the first scentence [i.e. primary intention] of ye same for higher things endite [write, compose]" (A2v). The rhyme royal stanza suggests closure to the notion that *Jack Juggler*, like Plautus's first comedy, harbors aspirations to "higher things." The

line is enjambed, however, and continues with the mirthful clarification that this maker “for higher things endite / In no wise [manner] he wold” (A2v). While Plautus was praised by Cicero for espousing such philosophy through comedy, “this maker” in no way follows this example, instead taking the opportunity to make “a game” (A2v), the “matter” of which is “not worth an oyster shel / Except percase it shall furtune too make you laugh well” (A2v): “for that purpose onely this maker did it wryte” (A2v).

Again, though, as the Prologue’s reliance on auctorial precedent suggests, the assertion that the play is “nothing at all” (A2v) seems disingenuous. The Prologue qualifies his insistence upon mirth as a consequence of the moment; for “the time is so quesie [unstable] / That he that speaketh best, is lest thanke worthie” (A2v). He implies that, in this cultural moment, classical learning is disparaged to the degree that a didactic play would be of little consequence. In a manner, the Prologue chastises the gathered auditors and, by implication, challenges them to take better account of learned material. The Prologue has already gone to great lengths to explain that Cicero advocates the hearing of interludes (A2r), and although it is in the context of advocating mirth, this mirth is not the only function of drama: the ancients commend “y^e old commedie” not only because it “may doo the minde comfort” but also because those who “here” it “be replenished with precepts of Philosophie / [because] The[y] conteine mutch wisdom & teache prude[n]t pollecie” (A2r). If indeed it is “in this maner of making, [that] Plautus did excell” (A2r), and if it is this manner of writing in which “this maker deliteth passinglye well, / Too folowe his arguments, and drawe out the same” (A2v), then there appears to be an underlying goal that advocates an interpretation of the interlude. The

Prologue, it seems, doth protest too much in asking that “no man looke to beare of matters substancyall / Nor matters of any gravitee either great or small” (A2v). Such rhetorical juxtaposition of matter and mirth, in fact, invites the opposite. This invitation plays out in the play proper, as it portrays a variety of Jack Juggler’s obfuscations and the other characters’ inability to recognize them as such. For example, the ease with which Jack dupes Jack Caraway—by disguising himself *as* Caraway—lays bare the gull’s folly. The play suggests, in the vein of Wright’s *Passions of the Mind*, that one might interpret the intentions his fellow. Such a lesson just as easily applies to the prologic teachings of the interludes broadly considered. Although the prologue to *Jack Juggler* purports to be concerned only with the audience’s entertainment, it also implies that they should work against the popular “quesie” disparagement of learning and instead engage the play in search of its “Philosophie,” “wisdom,” and lessons in “prudent pollicie.” While it does not formally invoke silence, it suggests a contemplation that may have been marked by quiet attentiveness.

Similarly, *Tom Tyler and His Wife* promises “merrie sport” but, through its repeated request for silence, also exercises a controlling maneuver. The prologue begins by performing the conventional deference to the audience: “My dutie first in humble wise fulfill’d, / I humble come, as humbly as I am will’d” (1.0.1-2).⁹ The thrice-repeated insistence upon the Prologue’s humility is a self-conscious reference to—if not a parody of—a humility topos that was a common trait in early modern prologics. This humility is not only performed for the Prologue’s benefit, however, since the author—who “wanted

⁹ Lincation for *Tom Tyler*, as the dating, is from Schelling, *Tom Tyler and His Wife*.

skill” (1.0.8)—is also implicated as he as “humbly... will’d” the speaker to perform the topos. The Prologue, in fact, distances himself from the writer, for the speaker has not “in [his] head such cunning [i.e. knowledge]” (1.0.13) of the ensuing interlude as the author. He cannot, therefore, rehearse the plot in the manner of *Nice Wanton* or *Jacob and Esau* and, like the audience, must wait to see it unfold. In addition to parodying the stock prologic characteristic of humility, this prologue, in the spirit the mirthful interlude, establishes his good will toward the audience and requests a return in kind: the Prologue “crave[s] your silence and good will” (1.0.7). In the context of the opening lines this humble request for silence may be seen as a means of gently clearing the air, a more reserved invocation of silence than that in *Damon and Pythias*.

The use of humility plays out until the prologue’s final lines in which a second call for silence, shrouded under the auspices of good will and communal exchange, takes a more controlling turn. As the prologue ends, the speaker reiterates his assignment to “come before to pray of you, / To make them [the actors] room, and silence as you may” (1.0.17-18). The construction suggests that silence is the audience’s prerogative, but the phrase “this being done” should give us pause. It could very well refer to the Prologue fulfilling his duties—“will’d” by the writer—to establish a humble, good will; it may also, however, present a caveat that would forestall the players’ entrance until silence is achieved. The latter reading imposes a more forceful tone on the otherwise benevolent Prologue, but in either case the prologue is working to establish silence—in its opening and its closing—as an expectation of the playspace. It is, as we have seen already, clearing the air. However, if we entertain the possibility that the prologic impetus behind

Tom Tyler's second invocation of silence is in fact an insistent, more controlling rhetorical maneuver, then we can glimpse the manner in which the interludes privilege a measured, exercised silence.

As we saw in Munday's *Affinati*, silence is safe and it communicates one's spiritual decorum. The fact that this would translate into an interlude tradition predicated upon morally, intellectually, and culturally valuable information seems to be a natural course of events. In the remainder of the chapter, then, I will expand the discussion of the meaning of silence in the early modern interludes before exploring the ways in which silence could be observed and measured by interpreting subjects. As I hope will become clear, the invocations of silence in interludes like *Damon and Pythias* and *Tom Tyler* do more than clear the air; these invocations also suggest a method of control that, appropriately, derives from intrinsic prologic authority.

Signifying Silences

In his study of aurality in the early modern period, Bruce Smith offers that the "goal is to counter the tyranny of Cartesian philosophy, with its privileging of visual experience, its ambition to speak with an authoritative voice;" Cartesian philosophy, he continues, is suspicious of aurality "because of the possibility that something might remain hidden, unseen, unsaid" (26). Of course what he describes here as a threat to Cartesian philosophy is silence, which if "unsaid" is "hidden" and necessarily "unseen." Christine Luckyj points out that, in the early modern period, there was a "growing association of silence with the inscrutable and potentially dangerous subject" (9). This "dangerous" side of silence runs counter to the kinds of prudent silence we have seen in

Munday; Luckyj latches onto these subversive qualities of silence in suggesting that silence in the early modern period provides the female subject with the means to subvert masculinist discourse. Although they come to silence with different critical aims, both Luckyj and Smith astutely suggest that the self-fashioned Renaissance subject made silence somewhat suspect insofar as it hid one's interior thoughts. Indeed one might suggest that the central premise of Wright's *Passions of the Mind*—that early moderns could read innermost thoughts through outward shows—is a contemporary maneuver designed precisely to rein-in the “inscrutability” of silence.

If silence was not as safe as Munday's *Affinati* suggests, then the prologic invocation of silence is significantly complicated. The dramatic endeavor in the days before organized theater was already significantly troubled by religious and political pressures. Throughout the Elizabethan period the Puritan antitheatricalists decried performances.¹⁰ On a much more immediate—or worldly—level, however, an act dated 6 December 1574 banned “unchastity, sedition, or such like uncomly matter” from performance. Critics rightly cite this act as evidence of the contentious nature of the organized theater, but its reach does not extend into the domain of the privately sponsored interlude, provided that there is no “public or common collection of money of the auditory or beholders thereof” (Chambers, *Elizabethan* 4:269-70). The distinction certainly seems to be motivated, at least in part, by monetary interests as it is essentially a moratorium on freelance acting troupes. In the years following Elizabeth's condemnation by the papal bull of 1570, however, the state, fearful of its own citizens,

¹⁰ Cf. Jonas Barish (80-154 *passim*).

had a keen desire to track and account for everyone in the realm. This act and others like it, then, seem designed with an eye to accounting, and the degree to which such acts were enforced seems to have been enough to trouble even the Earl of Leicester's players who, fearful of such laws, appealed to him to allow them to wear his coat of arms as protection (Streitberger 57).

It is with such a potentially tumultuous setting that we might better contextualize invocations of silence in the interludes' prologues. Doing so begs the question: if silence is suspect, why exacerbate a precarious situation? The answer, paradoxically, seems to reside in a mentality similar to that behind the vagrancy laws; for all of its rhetorical danger, silence is necessary to hear a play and, perhaps more importantly, it is a way of accounting for the audience. When the interludes are constructed, as we have already seen, as containing didactic content, then a request for silence is to ask the audience not only to contemplate the matter but to affect the pose of the quiet scholar. To be sure, the added dramaturgical benefit of the interludes' rhetorical uses of silence is that those who might censure the play will instead observe the measured silence that will paint them as good citizens. One way of thinking about the interludes' silence is through the lens of what sociologist Stephen Clayman refers to as "mutual monitoring."¹¹ Clayman studies "disaffiliative" responses that requires an individuals' observation and measurement of the collective's behavior in relation to a speaker's rhetoric—the process of mutual

¹¹ In "Anatomy of Disaffiliative Response" Clayman relies upon a small subset of late-twentieth-century political speeches for his study, a fact which bespeaks the dangers in attempting to apply anachronistically theories of collective response to early modern audiences: the psychology and cognitive processes of the early modern individual can only ever be conjecture. It is my hope, thought, that reading prologic invocations of silence through the lens of this modern treatment of the cognitive processes involved in collective responses will clarify the way in which the prologic invocation of silence in the interludes functions.

monitoring—as an alternative to the individual spontaneity of “affiliative” responses that result from “independent decision-making” (113). Furthermore, Clayman situates silence within the realm of evaluative acts like applause or, if we map his reading onto early modern performances, hissing. In the dramatic setting, though, silence itself is evaluative on two planes: in the first instance it marks the audience’s attuned evaluation of the performance’s matter, but in the second it is a performance of that evaluative act that can itself be evaluated by fellow auditors and the performers. This is to say (paraphrasing Hamlet) that there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so, and in the setting of these performances it is prudent (paraphrasing Iago) for one to wear this act of thinking on one’s sleeve.

Palsgrave’s *Acolastus* (? , 1540), although it predates Elizabeth’s reign, nonetheless demonstrates rather insistently the kind of control that might be exercised in a collection of individuals. The Prologue clearly delineates himself from the “company of players” by referring to them as “our flock” (B3v). In creating this distance the Prologue not only exemplifies a prologic authority separate from that of the play proper but he also carves out a space in which he can chastise the players’ presumption in thinking that their performances are worthy of prizes when the players actually are guilty of “mysse settinge” otherwise good comedies. Calling a player to the stage—an authoritative, extra-dramatic move unto itself—the Prologue notes that

There is one, I wote not who, that fretteth inwardly.i.that chaffeth in the gylles, or that smoketh (s.at this geare) howe thou,i.harke.s.hyther, thou felowe) why burne thy lyghtes.i.why glore thyn eyes.s.in thy heade. Why waggest thou thy heed, as though thou were very angry? (B4r)

Indulging our imaginations we can see this comic affront as the climax of the Prologue's accusations: we can imagine that the actor has stood seething on the periphery, unable to break prologic decorum and defend himself. When he is called to the stage to answer for his faults he performs his anger, comically solidifying the representational divide between Prologue and player. More to the point, in the Prologue's chastening tirade he suggests that he can discern "one ... that fretteth inwardly" (B4r) by his outward displays: if one "chaffeth in the gills," "smoketh," glare too long, or wag his or her head, they are providing the signs necessary for others to interpret their inner anger.

Acolastus's Prologue does not simply describe the player's actions but judges them as well. After offering "the naile of my myddell finger, in token ... that I despise the" (B4r), he is explicit in his assertions that these are not the actions of "good men":

we care or go about onely to please good men, they wyll never tourne to
 vyce.i.they wyll never fynde faute at the thyng, whiche they shall
 fele.i.perceyve to be done for study of them.i.for good wyll towards them, or for
 the good wyll that menne beare towards them if it be not in every condycion
 donne sufficiently inough, yet for all that done with a dilege[n]ce. (B4r)

The Prologue effectively translates the actor's presumption—or, rather, the actor's bodily manifestations of his anger at the Prologue's catalogue of his presumption—into the actor's inability to perceive the merit of the interludes' edifying intentions. The actor, relegated to the periphery of the prologue, becomes an auditor. As such he provides the actual audience with a negative example of decorum. By re-casting the actor as an object lesson, the Prologue is able to assert that "good men" will understand the merit of the interlude that follows and he pointedly implies the improper way to go about demonstrating that understanding. The proper manner of demonstration, the Prologue

later posits, is to “beare thy good mynd to lerning by thy sylence, whyle our company is busye or occupied aboute our playe” (B4v). In the same way that the disgruntled actor’s outward displays of disapproval are visible, so too is the display of “lerning.”

The prologue to *Acolastus* frames silence as the only acceptable response to the interlude and implies that any other action is observable and therefore subject to rebuke of the kind the audience has just witnessed. In this capacity as a rhetorical construct, silence is doing much more than simply clearing the air. The audience’s silence serves as an outward sign of their engagement with the interlude and suggests their understanding of its edifying value. Moreover, in manufacturing the audience’s engaged silence the prologue amplifies the interlude’s value with each moment that passes in the rapt silence of its auditors. The Prologue, then, has attempted to manufacture a contemplative silence as the antithesis of observable disapproval; that is to say that he has attempted to construct silence as the only communally acceptable response to the play at hand, thereby facilitating a favorable response to the drama on the stage while imposing a rhetorical posture on the auditory.

Of course I do not intend to suggest with the example of *Acolastus*—or any other prologue’s call for silence—that the interlude’s auditors were ever completely silent. Again, the presentation of an interlude was but one of many markers of festive occasions, and it is much more likely, under such circumstances, that the audience would have been prone to vocal expression. What these prologues demonstrate, however, is a rhetorical use of silence to encourage their audiences to weigh the interludes’ matter against their mirth. Insofar as it is an observable response, the prologues suggest that the

performance of silence communicates one's desire to interpret and understand the dramatic events that were a part of their celebrations.

Although silence may be little more than an ideal, its presence in the interludes speaks to an authorial desire to retain a sense of control not just over the audience—although this may very well be the case—but also over the perception of the dramatic endeavor writ large. As the various vagrancy laws and the endemic antitheatricalist attitudes attest, the period in which the interludes were performed was fraught with impediments, both logistical and cultural. As drama is driving toward what will become the institution of the early modern theater, it seeks legitimacy. In these conditions the prologic ideal of silence—with its implications of measured contemplation—can be interpreted as prologic authority's gesture toward this legitimacy; it suggests that plays were something to think about.

The next chapter moves into the era of decidedly more legitimacy for the theater (although it is never quite free and clear). In it I will explore John Lyly's engagement with his own legitimacy; as we shall see, Lyly also draws upon prologic authority, but instead of constructing his audience's engagements with his plays, his underlying concern is in constructing his own authorial persona. Working in the age of an increasingly established theater industry, and an age in which the writers of plays were not as dependent upon festive occasions or benevolent patrons (like the theater itself, though, they were not free and clear), Lyly tries throughout his dramatic career to use his skill as a dramatist and a rhetorician to gain a position at Elizabeth's court. If, in the interludes, we have been witness to the early stages of organized drama, then in Lyly's

theater we will glimpse the early stages of authorial ego; while the interludes relied upon prologic authority to insist that plays, as such, had merit, Lyly relies upon it to suggest that their writers have merit as well.

CHAPTER III

“THE SHADOW OF OUR AUTHORS DREAM”:

JOHN LYLY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN AUTHORIAL PERSONA

“What meanes longe lockes before? *that such as meete,*
Maye houlde at firste, when they occasion finde.
 Thy heade behinde all balde, what telles it more?
That none shoulde houlde, that let me slippe before.”

– from Geoffrey Whitney’s “In ocassionem” in *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586)

“...I find occasion bald both before and behind, for
 wheresoever I snatch, I meet with a bare scalp.”

– John Lyly in a letter to Sir Robert Cecil, 17 Jan 1594¹

In a letter to Sir Robert Cecil, member of the Privy Council and eventual successor to his father, William Cecil, as Queen Elizabeth’s Secretary, John Lyly notes an unspecified bar to his opportunity “to shew [his] dutifull affection.” The letter does not apologize for any indiscretion that led to his unfortunate circumstance, but rather attempts to refurbish what Lyly perceives as a drop in Cecil’s esteem for him. In the lines cited in the epigraph, the playwright laments his own inability to find viable opportunities: for whenever Occasion—opportunity’s allegorical personification—presents herself, the “longe lockes” onto which one “shoulde holde” are nowhere to be found. The emblem for “In ocassionem” from Geoffrey Whitney’s *A Choice of Emblems* testifies that Occasion does not appear to be an easy figure to seize in any event: she is

¹ Reprinted in Bond (1:390). All citations from Lyly are from Bond and hereafter will be listed parenthetically to indicate volume and page; play citations will indicate act, scene, and line. In some cases, Lyly’s prologues for two separate venues are extant—e.g., for the court, Blackfriars, or Paul’s—and each had different rhetorical aims, therefore, where the distinction is unclear and necessary, the venue will be indicated parenthetically antecedent to the act, scene, and line citation.

tossed about the seas atop an ever-evasive wheel; her winged feet denote nimbleness; and her “longe lockes” are swept forward to encourage individuals to *carpe occasionem*, as it were, and to denote just how difficult it is to snatch Occasion once she has passed. Lyly’s image of a bald Occasion speaks, then, to the compounding of impediments to his advancement in Elizabeth’s court: due to some perceived slight, it would seem, Lyly’s Occasion has been shorn.

In the context of his early career, Lyly’s claim about Occasion’s limited availability might seem disingenuous at worst and, at best, hyperbolic, for it seems as though opportunities presented themselves early and often. Bond suggests that his first literary success, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578), was the first English novel (1:159) and in its day warranted a sequel, *Euphues and His England* (1580). The two works taken together were published seventeen times before 1594. If we can rely on these print-related numbers to denote popularity, Lyly’s proliferation might suggest that his work garnered him the patronage of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford and theater enthusiast, who may very well have encouraged Lyly to turn his highly-wrought rhetorical style—dubbed euphuism by contemporaries—to writing plays for the Queen and her court. Given this opportunity, Lyly apparently innovated and pleased, introducing for example the dramatic comic subplot and presenting allegories of the artist-monarch dynamic: *Campaspe* (1583, 1584) depicts the painter, Apelles, successfully vying for Campaspe’s hand with the warlike but beneficent Alexander the Great; *Sapho and Phao* (1583, 1584) has Queen Sapho (and, for that matter, her rival Venus) fall in love with the beautiful but humble ferryman Phao, whose “thoughts are no

greater than [his] fortunes, nor [his] desires greater than [his] calling” (1.1.2-4); and, most famously, in *Endymion* (1586, 1591) the eponymous shepherd falls incurably in love with Cynthia, the moon and common trope for the depiction of Elizabeth.² Again, if we can rely upon printing house evidence of Lyly’s popularity, his first two plays, *Campaspe* and *Sapho and Phao*, were published in five editions within two years of their initial year of publication, something of an unrivalled success in the period.³

Taken together, the popularity of Lyly’s plays and his letter addressed to a Privy Counselor attest to the fact that Lyly had in fact snatched Occasion from time to time. Early in his life Lyly gained the support of Robert Cecil’s father, Lord Burleigh, to whom the playwright may owe his education at Oxford, his potential post-baccalaureate education at Cambridge, and his patronage by Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford and Burleigh’s son-in-law. If in fact Lyly were circulating amongst Oxford’s and Burleigh’s courtly cohort then he was certainly keeping the right company for advancement. Most importantly for Lyly, however, was that these connections—coupled with his literary accomplishments—won him closer proximity to the Queen herself: not only do all but one of Lyly’s extant plays’ title pages boast of performance before her,⁴ but on at least two occasions in the latter decade of his life he sent letters of petition directly to Elizabeth.

² Much has been made of the allegorical aspects of *Endymion*, the chief conceits being Cynthia as Elizabeth and Endymion as Leicester or Lyly himself. Cf. Bond (3:81-103) for an extensive reading of the allegory and its proponents to 1902. Hunter catalogues more recent variations of possible allegories (186-91). Houppert considers the allegorical interest “unfortunate” (95); Pincombe notes the allegory in order “to move on to more interesting matters” (87).

³ As Zachary Lesser and Alan Farmer demonstrate in “The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited”—a re-examination of Peter Blayney’s influential “The Publication of Playbooks”—one in five plays published in the period were republished again within five years (19). Cf. Blayney’s riposte, “The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks.”

⁴ *Mother Bombie* (1591, 1594) is the lone exception.

Viewing his lament over the apparent devaluation of his social capital with Robert Cecil through the lens of his connections—either real or imagined—Lyly’s desire to remedy the apparent fall from grace with the hyperbolic assertion that opportunity only presents itself in untenable circumstances at least seems reasonable. As the ensuing discussion will bear out, Lyly spent his dramatic career carefully constructing an authorial persona as a means toward personal political preferment; thus, any challenge to that goal would require a response. Written in mid-1594, this letter may very well betray Lyly’s growing sense of anxiety with regard to his position at court. Around 1589 he anonymously penned a pamphlet—*A Papper with an Hatchet*—that tied the playwright to the church’s anti-Puritan side of the Martin Marprelate controversy.⁵ Even though the anti-Martinist campaign was commissioned by the state, the satirical pamphlets nevertheless had their own fraught relationship with the censors. Indeed, Lyly’s involvement in the controversy is thought to have directly contributed to the suppression of the Children of Paul’s in 1590, a troupe of boy actors for whom Lyly had written all of his plays (Bond 1:62). In the wake of such events—which may have precipitated the bar to his ability “to shew [his] dutifull affection”—Lyly’s letter of complaint in 1594 seems apropos.

Regardless of whether or not one can consider these an unfortunate chain of events, the 1594 letter makes evident Lyly’s primary concern with his personal political

⁵ “Martin Marprelate” was the pseudonymous author behind Puritanical tracts published in the late 1580s that criticized the Church’s policy of censorship. Although it was published anonymously, Bond asserts that “Lyly’s authorship [of *Papper*] cannot seriously be doubted” (3:390), and it has not. It was one of a handful of anti-Martinist tracts commissioned by the Church of England to combat the Martinists in their own terms: satirical pamphleteering. On Lyly’s *Papper* and general involvement in the controversy see Bond (1:49-60 and 3:388-92); on the controversy, see Edward Arber, *An Introductory Sketch of the Martin Marprelate Controversy, 1588-1590* and Jesse Lander, *Inventing Polemic* (80-109).

position, and in what follows I will consider the ways in which Lyly incorporates these goals into his plays' prologues. In constructing an authorial persona with the specific goal of royal preferment, John Lyly draws upon the precedent of prologic authority. This is to say that while he recognizes and develops the prologic conventions that we saw take shape in the Elizabethan interludes, he also manipulates them, internalizing and bending the prologic space's inherently authorial nature to bring the figure of the individual playwright to the fore. By exploring his deftly rhetorical prologues, this chapter suggests that Lyly plays an integral part in our understanding of the early modern period's conceptualization of the individual, responsible author: it argues that Lyly was not simply a state-sponsored, passive writer who was relegated to the margins of the interpretational enterprise, but instead was a playwright with a deep investment in his craft and a developed sense of authorial possessiveness.

Lyly's Constructed Courtesies

John Lyly occupied an interstitial moment between the interlude tradition, which accentuated its inherent didacticism, and the plays for the public with their more popular interests. His later plays display an affinity with the latter, but even while *The Theatre* and the *Rose* were growing to prominence in the 1580s Lyly's early plays inherited substantial prologic characteristics from the interludes. For example his first play, *Campaspe*, displays a continuity with convention in Lyly's insistence that the play "mixed mirth with counsell, and discipline with delight" (court, 1.0.25-6); likewise *Sapho and Phao*'s prologue suggests that "the wise" consider it "a great pleasure to heare counsell mixed with witte" (Blackfriars, 1.0.10). Examples such as these of Lyly's

insistence that his plays not only offer entertainment but also provide “counsel” or “discipline” seems particularly to have relied on the didactic authority intrinsic to interludes. An affinity with the interlude tradition seems appropriate for Lyly insofar as he was writing plays for performance by Paul’s Boys: his position as the Master of Paul’s Boys may have compounded—or commanded—a didactic authority of a kind with that found in the interludes. More than his relation to the players, however, the playwright’s invocation of the interludes’ insistence on their inherent value speaks to Lyly’s own anxious self-justification of his dramatic endeavors, a point that is especially resonant in these first two plays.

Lyly had an acute awareness of the play-as-given; he understood and was anxious about the fundamental fact that all plays—but his in particular—belonged to the audience once the performance began. Accordingly, manifestations of this authorial anxiety creep into his prologues, the last site in which authorial concerns might resonate for the consuming, judging audience. In his very first dramatic endeavor, for example, *Campaspe*’s prologue for the Blackfriars—an extensive testament to and excuse for the play’s inadequacies—opens with a comparison between “we which stand in awe of reporte” (1.0.4) and “they that feare the stinging of waspes” (1.0.1), and it appropriately concludes with the hope that the audience will not voice their own contempt for the play even if “there bee in your precise judgementes an universall mislike” (1.0.32-33). We see another such preemptive strike against potential criticisms in *Sapho and Phao*’s Blackfriars prologue:

The Griffyon never spreadeth her wings in the sunne, when she hath sick feathers: yet have we ventured to present our exercises beefore your judgements,

when we know them full of weak matter, yeelding rather our selves to the curtesie, which we have ever found, then to the precisenesse, which wee ought to feare. (1.0.17-12)

Of course the rhetoric of the humility topos is veiled only barely, as the comparison of the lackluster play to the ill Griffin still suggests at least the potential for awe-inspiring greatness.⁶ Regardless of how the prologic voice frames the play, it also reiterates the audience's proclivity toward "precise" judgments that gild no lilies. Indeed, the prologic voice expresses a "feare" of such "precisenesse" that, while rhetorical, nonetheless illuminates Lyly's understanding that—for better or worse—judgment of the performed play falls to audience.

In these prologues for his Blackfriars audiences this "feare" manifests itself as a prologic gesture toward rhetorical control. In *Campaspe*, as in the Elizabethan interludes, the notion of the audience's measureable silence moves into clear view as the prologue ends by suggesting that, even if the audience should find fault with the play, "yet wee maye enjoy by your woonted courtesies a general silence" (1.0.33-34). Here as in the interludes the invocation of silence is not suggested but instituted as a rule of decorum in the public, play-going space; this continuity in the rhetorical uses of silence is witnessed also in the prologue's opening insinuation that audiences' "reporte" is annoying, like the pesky sting of the wasp (1.0.1) or the bothersome prattle of the "chatting of birdes" which so taxed Lepidus (1.0.2-3). In this instance the prologic voice suggests that, should the players meet with anything other than the "general silence,"

⁶ As discussed in the introduction above, the humility topos, for such late medieval writers as Chaucer, was a convention that may easily be read for its irony. Lyly, as shall become clear, is similarly performing this humility.

then the audience is demonstrating not only a break from their own established (“woonted”) courtesy but also an affinity for annoyance.

If *Campaspe* suggests comparisons between the irksome auditor and vocal response, *Sapho and Phao* uses its audience’s measureable response to demarcate a much more explicit indictment of the offender. Near the opening, the prologic voice paints the potentially unsatisfied auditor as a starved bear who,

seeing you cannot draw from our labours sweete content, you leave behinde you a sowre mislike: and with open reproach blame our good meanings, because you cannot reape your wonted mirthes. Our intent was at this time to move inward delight, not outward lightnesse, and to breede (if it might bee) soft smiling, not loude laughing: knowing it to the wise to be as great pleasure to hear counsell mixed with witte, as to the foolish to have sporte mingled with rudenesse.
(Blackfriars 1.0.4-11)

In the same way that *Campaspe* frames “reporte” as an annoyance, the *Sapho and Phao* prologue suggests that “sowre mislike” begets “open reproach” instead of “soft smiling.” This prologue, however, goes further than the mere suggestion of shame in its antecedent in that it directly chastises those who “leave behinde [...] a sowre mislike” for, essentially, not perceiving authorial intent. In *Sapho and Phao*, “your woonted courtesies” have been replaced by “your wonted mirthes,” and the second-person possessive pronoun invites the direct contrast with the first person in “our intent,” thus insisting that the reproachful auditor does a disservice to the well-intentioned prologic voice. More than simply scoffing at this ostensible affront, the prologic voice constructs silence—and, it suggests, approval—as the only proper response by marking “open reproach” and “loud laughing” as the visible and aural signs of “outward lightnesse,” foolhardiness, and “rudenesse.” In this framework, then, the audience’s displays of

disapproval would denote that they did not understand the playwright's intentions and that they were prone to frivolous entertainments; they are clearly disassociated from "the wise" who consider it "great pleasure to hear counsell mixed with witte." In constructing such distinctions, the prologic voice uses visual and aural responses to garner implied approval of their play and its matter.

As *Midas* (1589, 1592) attests, Lyly's non-court prologues remain consistent in their rhetorical constructions of the audience. The prologue, given at Paul's, concludes with the admission that "Wee are jelous of [i.e. fearful of]⁷ your judgementes, because you are wise" (Paul's, 1.0.21) and the hope that "presenting our studies before Gentlemen, thogh they [the audience] receive inward mislike, wee shall not be hist with open disgrace" (1.0.24-5). The prologic voice, then, humbly defers to the audience's judgment even as it fears it—"jealous" connotes both senses—and suggests that hissing is the perceivable performance of disapproval. Moreover, it states that the audience is "wise" and suggests that such a show of disapproval as hissing would not behoove the "Gentlemen" for whom they perform: the prologic voice rather insistently constructs the auditors as gentlemen by framing the prologue with reminders in the closing line and in making "gentlemen" the first word of address to the audience. It is clear the Lyly retains the sense that the audience will be judging his play and that he uses his prologic space to guide that judgment.

⁷ The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests as possible definitions in this context two senses of "jealous": on the one hand it implies a protective, possessive interest, while on the other a fearful sense of suspicion. Given this project's ongoing consideration of the anxiety surrounding the surrender of the play to the audience, it seems reasonable to conjecture that being "jealous of" the audience's judgment carries both senses: the prologic voice humbly notes that the author values the audience's opinion even while he fears it.

More directly pertinent to an understanding of the development of popular drama, however, the prologic space of *Midas* at once announces significant shifts in matters of public taste for the theater and constructs Lyly's audience's response to those shifts. Bruster and Weimann take the prologue's characterization of the culture's predilection for generic intermingling and popular fashion as one of the first early modern references to the heterogeneous audience and its effects on play production.⁸ The first four-fifths of the prologue is an extensive explication of precisely how "nice [i.e. fickle] is the world" (Paul's, 1.0.1), that concludes with an apology: "If wee present a mingle-mangle, our fault is to be excused, because the whole worlde is become an Hodge-podge" (19-20). Such preemptive self-abnegation certainly serves to lower expectations and to perform prologic humility. The gist of the prologic voice's complaints is that "[t]rafficke and travell hath woven the nature of all Nations into ours, and made this land like Arras, full of devise, which was Broade-cloth, full of workmanship" (1.0.13-15). The implication that intercultural contaminants that are "full of device" have defiled England's otherwise skilled craftsmanship is somewhat disingenuous coming from Lyly, whose literary fame, one may argue, is owed to his ability to craft novel, rhetorically over-stylized prose. It cannot be coincidental, for example, that the prologic voice uses the same term—device—to describe both the overwrought nature of the metaphorical Arras and "our Authors" work (1.0.22). To be sure, the latter sense is meant to critique "our Author"—"because he is idle"—just as it critiques the arras, but Lyly trains us to question such homage to abject humility. Indeed,

⁸ Bruster and Weimann (117-34, passim).

the note “To the Ladies” that is prefixed to *Euphues and His England* opens with a comparison between this prose work and the handiwork of Arachne, who had “woven in cloth of Arras, a Raine-bow of sundry silkes” (Bond 2:8.5-6). In both cases, Lyly’s argument goes, the variety of colors that may be lacking in the visible parts of the works—that is to say, in *Midas*’s arras and in *Euphues*—should be imagined to reside just beyond our human perception, thus situating the imaginative onus for his *Euphues* in the mind of the reader. Mapping this move onto *Midas* suggests that the play highlights rather than detracts from its “device.” Furthermore, if we consider *Midas* to be the first of Lyly’s “late plays”—dividing his four earlier, courtly plays from his latter four, more “experimental” plays—it becomes clear that the variety offered by “trafficke and travell” should not be considered a detriment to English plainness but rather a sign of the changing dramatic tastes.⁹ His protestations in this prologue might best be read as self-conscious hyperbole, another marker of Lyly’s trademark euphuistic style that affirms the value of dramatic innovation. In the prologic space of *Midas*, then, Lyly goes beyond simply shaping the audience’s measureable response to his plays: having foreclosed upon ungentlemanly hissing, the prologue shapes an implicit affirmation of innovation that is exemplified in this case by his own euphuistic style.

Affecting Humility

In Lyly’s non-court prologues, the playwright negotiates his anxiety over the intervening audience by rhetorically framing their responses to the plays. This section

⁹ Although she does not use these terms—“late” or “early”—Scragg, for example, observes a “process of experimentation at work in the cluster of Lylian comedies composed circa 1589” (*Woman* 5). This “cluster” includes *Midas*, *Mother Bombie*, and *Woman in the Moon* specifically.

will examine the manner in which his prologues for the court negotiate this anxiety by accentuating the traditional humility topos. This rhetorical maneuver is certainly sensible given the auspices of these prologues: when a playwright has a queen in the audience a sleight-of-hand insistence upon acceptance of the play would seem pretentious at best and presumptuous at worst. While, Lyly's prologues for performances for the Queen ostensibly cede interpretative agency to her, I want to suggest that Lyly's abject humility in these court prologues is itself a performance of prologic and courtly conventions. This is not to doubt the genuineness of Lyly's deference to the Queen, as such reasoning misses the point; rather, one should understand Lyly's performance of humility in the context of his other uses of prologic convention. Lyly was keenly aware of prologic conventions and courtly courtesy, and he was just as keen to construct a self-effacing persona by manipulating the inherently authorial bent of the prologic space. This is to say that the authorial possessiveness that manifests itself as rhetorical control in his non-court prologues translates, in his court prologues, into an expression of the self-effacing authorial persona.

In the court prologue to *Endymion*, for example, the prologic voice demonstrates the authorial interest inherent in this kind of humility. On the whole, the prologue outdoes itself in repeatedly insisting that the play, in its very conceptualization, is utterly ridiculous:

Most high and happy Princesse, we must tell you a tale of the Man in the Moone, which if it seeme ridiculous for the method, or superfluous for the matter, or for the meanes incredible, for three faultes wee can make but one excuse. It is a tale of the Man in the Moone.

It was forbidden in olde time to dispute of Chymera, because it was a fiction: we hope in our times none will apply pastimes, because they are fancies;

for there liveth none under the Sunne, that knowes what to make of the Man in the Moone. Wee present neither Comedie, nor Tragedie, nor storie, nor anie thing, but that whosoever heareth may say this, Why here is a tale of the Man in the Moone.

In this brief opening, the prologic voice four times mentions that the play is only ever a “tale” of the man in the moon. One might, in fact, agree that the play’s narrative is relatively ridiculous: a man, Endymion, falls in love with the moon, Cynthia (who is also the Queen); Tellus’s cronies retaliate by putting Endymion to sleep for forty years. The suggestion, then, that the auditor, in keeping with the tradition surrounding the Chimera, should recognize this “tale” as “a fiction” and not attempt to test it with interpolated facts seems logical. But it is also a case in which the prologic voice doth protest too much: as we have seen, Lyly’s plays celebrate the mixture of mirth and matter, so for this play to completely forgo that model seems less likely than the fact that the skilled rhetorician would be overstating his case.

Such rhetorical misdirection would, of course, be prudent for a playwright who might potentially offend his courtly audience. Again we see Lyly’s understanding of interpretation as seated with his audience, and *Endymion*, particularly, makes clear the potential dangers in this fact: the epilogue to the play suggests that Lyly’s detractors—“the malicious that seeke to overthrowe us with threats”—necessitate a request that the Queen look favorably upon the play in spite of these dissenting voices. *Endymion* has proven, in fact, to be the most analyzed of Lyly’s plays; for the narrative of a lovelorn devotee and an ethereal queen begs for an allegorized interpretation in spite of—or perhaps because of—the prologue’s insinuations to the contrary. Whether Lyly is encouraging or forestalling the audience’s role in interpreting court drama, he is

certainly framing it in such a way as to ward off the threats from his “malicious” auditors by constructing Elizabeth’s approval as diametrically opposed to them. The somewhat disingenuous prologue, in protecting the interests of the play by insinuating that it is little more than a mirthful escape, is as self-preserving as it is self-effacing.

If the prologue to *Endymion* is invested in authorial interests, the court prologues to Lyly’s other plays seem most interested in portraying the authorial figure in a state of perpetual and exaggerated genuflection. The prologic voice to *Sapho and Phao* literally performs its humility in stating that, “whatsoever we present [...] in all humblenesse we all, & I on one knee for all, entreate, that your Highnesse imagine your self to be in a deepe dreame” (court 1.0.12-16). The pronominal “I” refers to the prologic speaker, of course, who admits to being the, as it were, stand-in for the rest of the involved parties signified by the collective “we;” to be sure, though, this “I” also represents Lyly. With a similar brand of humility, the prologic voice in *Campaspe* frames the opening by beginning and ending with a profession of the shame that “wee” feel in bringing forth such a substandard play. Of course the idea that the play is in so many ways lacking is the epitome of a performed humility, the tone of which is compounded by the prologue’s comparison of the players to the self-consuming torch: “with us it is like to fare, as with these torches, which giving light to others, consume themselves: and wee shewing delight to others, shame ourselves” (court 1.0.16-18). Humility gives way to humiliation, and the Prologue’s reference to the torches that lit the court playspace create a visual point of comparison to ground the metaphor in reality. The makers of the play—the collective “wee”—devote themselves to a self-annihilating enterprise.

On the most fundamental level, however, the court prologues cede interpretative agency for the play over to the Queen herself in a move that seems to counter the authorially possessive impulse. In the *Sapho and Phao* prologue, the prologic voice entreats “that your Highnesse imagine your self to be in a deepe dreame” while viewing the play (court 1.0.15-16); similarly, *Campaspe*’s prologic voice hopes that the play will resemble Agrippa’s shadows, “who in the moment they were seene, were of any shape one would conceive” (court 1.0.14-15); and the prologue to *Gallathea* (1585, 1592) suggests that the Queen’s viewing of the play will make the entertainment virtuous by association since “in your Majesties minde, where nothing doth harbor but virtue, nothing can enter but virtue” (1.0.14-16). All of these constructions situate imaginative responsibility for the play clearly in the Queen’s mind’s eye. With *Campaspe*, the prologic voice suggests that, even if what she sees is not pleasurable, she might nonetheless make it so with her imagination; the same is implied by *Sapho*’s excuse that, in any event, the play and its foibles are but a dream. In *Gallathea* the theme is a little more insistent, as it seems to suggest that, for the play to enter the Queen’s ken at all, it must be virtuous: in other words, the prologic voice seems to set the Queen’s acceptance of the play as a precondition for its performance, ipso facto constructing its virtuous content. In any event Lyly’s court prologues seem to buy into the notion of the play as fundamentally given away by yielding the play’s imaginative responsibility to the Queen, thus marking an apparent shift from the rhetorical control that has been so prevalent in prologic spaces.

Ceding responsibility in this way may very well be understood as another means of self-preservation for Lyly, but given his style such a move is likely to be another instance of rhetorical overstatement. Bond tells us that

Lyly's famous euphuism aims at writing prose, firstly with great fineness and precision of phrase, secondly with great display of classical learning and remote knowledge of all kinds. To these two desiderata correspond the two classes of its characteristics; firstly those concerned with the structure of his sentences, and secondly, those methods of ornament and illustration which, though properly considered a part of style, are yet more akin to the material than to the architecture of thought, and demand of the architect the quarryman's, as well as the sculptor's tool. (1:120)

The displays of classical learning through which, Bond asserts, Lyly demonstrates the depths of learning that he has plumbed seem at turns to have been as rhetorically embellished as his prose itself. Bond notes, for example, that in the classical precedent cited in the court prologue to *Campaspe* to justify the hyperbolic elevation of the lackluster play—"But as *Jupiter* places *Silenus Asse* among the starred, and *Alcebiades* covered his pictures being Owles and Apes, with a courtaine embroidered with Lions and Eagles, so are we enforced upon a rough discourse to drawe on a smooth excuse" (1.0.3-6)—the reference to Alcibiades is an example of "Lyly's common trick of capping an authorized instance [*"Silenus Asse"* is from book VI of Ovid's *Fasti*] by an invented one" (Bond 4:541n). Carter A. Daniel notes that while most of Lyly's euphuistic speech that relies upon "mythical legends of beasts and plants" is "taken from Pliny and other Latin writers, some are apparently Lyly's own whimsical inventions" (12). Even though Bond paints Lyly as a miner of classical literature, and although Lyly certainly possessed a great deal of such knowledge, the playwright was at least as interested in the appearance of such learning as the substance. In the same manner his

elaborate sentence structure speaks to an ornamental aspect of prose that has less to do with substance than display.

This digression into Lyly's characteristic euphuism suggests that the playwright is as interested in the performance of deference as he is in actual deference to his regent. His rhetorical kowtowing is an additional instantiation of his euphuistic style, expressed hyperbolically to call attention to this performance-as-rhetoric and, at the same time, to call attention to Lyly as the euphuist. Under the heading "Structural Euphuism Diminishes," Bond reprints a slightly altered version of a chart published by G. C. Child that shows the manner in which the structural, rhetorical devices that are most prevalent in the *Euphuies* works decline in incidence over the course of Lyly's dramatic career.¹⁰ On one hand this can be understood as euphuism's decline in popularity and of Lyly's recognition of, and adaptation to, this fact. As a caveat to strict, linear interpretation Bond suggests that "it would, perhaps, be impossible to prove progressive diminution, step by step, in the successive plays" (2:290); but the Bond/Child graphic is nonetheless instructive in demonstrating an overall shift away from these euphuistic characteristics. Moreover, many of the euphuistic devices spike in the fourth play, *Endymion*; in fact the plays' euphuism is heavily weighted toward this play and its three predecessors, *Campaspe*, *Sapho and Phao*, and *Gallathea*, all of which I have grouped as having the more "courtly" prologic material.¹¹ If the plays in which Lyly most readily appears to

¹⁰ Bond, 2:289. I will not reproduce either version of the chart here, but its y-axis lists the plays in descending chronological order while the x-axis maps the euphuistic devices: alliteration, annomination ("consonantal without vowel similarity, e.g. nature, nurture" [Bond 2:289 n3]), consonance, repetition, rhyme, classical allusion, "fabulous natural history," and (an addition in Bond) Latin quotations.

¹¹ Of Lyly's latter four plays, *Midas* and *Woman in the Moon* lack differentiated court prologues while *Mother Bombie* and *Love's Metamorphosis* have no extant prologues.

cede interpretive agency to the Queen are also those plays that, as Bond suggests, are his most euphuistic, then it stands to reason that both contexts—*Euphues* and the plays—are related expressions of over-constructed rhetoric. Moreover, it suggests that Lyly's pronounced reversion to euphuism in his early, courtly plays is an attempt by the playwright to capitalize on his stylistic résumé. He is able, then, to simultaneously perform the humble servant and the skilled rhetorician.

If we return to *Endymion* with an eye to this euphuism, the repetition of the play's purely fictional provenance deflects criticism, as I have suggested, but also showcases the rhetorical uses of euphuism in the play. Commenting on *Endymion*'s ridiculous narrative, Carter A. Daniel suggests that “if Lyly had written seriously about a man in love with the moon, then we could, in fact would have to, laugh at the author's stupidity. But as it is we cannot laugh at Lyly here: he has already beaten us to it by laughing at himself” (13). The very nature of this euphuistic love story, based as it is on the fabulous and “unnatural” relationship between a man and the moon, therefore deflects potentially injurious allegorical readings in a rhetorical maneuver aimed at self-preservation. However, insofar as euphuism is an “ornately symmetrical prose style filled with *fantastical similes* and constructed in rhythmic swirls of alliteration and antithesis” (Daniel 11, my emphasis), the prologue to *Endymion* is also a self-advertisement not only of this play but of Lyly as a stylist.

By reading Lyly's court prologues through the lens of euphuism, then, we might begin to understand his ostensible ceding of imaginative control as another of his many rhetorical performances. Indeed, even if their apparent relinquishing of the interpretive

reins seems the antithesis to the more directly manipulative Blackfriars and Paul's prologues, which commandeer their audiences' interpretive agency, the court prologues must be considered as a further extension of prologic conventions. Lyly's humility before the Queen is necessary and advisable, but, in making this humility an extension of his signature euphuism, the playwright at once calls attention to his understanding of decorum and to his conception of prologic conventions. Perhaps most importantly, however, Lyly's rhetorical dexterity advances an authorial persona that is able to maneuver deftly within the literary/dramatic as well as the courtly worlds; constructing this persona was of the utmost importance to Lyly throughout his career but especially in his court prologues.

Greater Matters

Returning to Lyly's simile of the playmakers-as-torches may help us to understand precisely why Lyly worked to construct such a deferential authorial persona. To be sure, the image frames the prologic voice's sense of shame and serves as a metaphor for the actors' melting into the background, "consum[ing] themselves." Insofar as the analogy defers responsibility for the avowedly inadequate performance to the audience, it also underscores Lyly's understanding of the play-as-given. However, the euphuistic parallelism of the central comparison—"which giving light to others, consume themselves: and wee shewing delight to others, shame ourselves" (court 1.0.16-18)—directly associates the torch's "giving light to others" and the players' "shewing delight to others." Of course the interplay between "light" and "delight" and the duality of "shewing"—as, perhaps, "lighting the way" as well as "performing a play"—suggest

that the prologic voice thinks that the play itself is worthy of consideration; the voice suggests that the “shew” can in fact “give light to others” in its own way. Such a line of reasoning would be in keeping with the didactic prologic traditions from whence these early prologues arise. This image, then, intertwines a sense of self-abnegation—or self-consumption—inherent to the act of giving the play over, and in doing so intimates that the playwrights, as they “shame [them] selves,” make an extreme sacrifice for the benefit of the audience.

More to the point, reading through the lens of *Campaspe*'s prologue for the Blackfriars helps to refine our understanding of Lyly's sacrificial rhetoric. In the context of begging the audience's pardon for the play's foibles and defending the play's mixture of “discipline and delight,” the Prologue somewhat boldly proclaims that “we hope, as Harts that cast their hornes, Snakes their skinnes, Eagles their bils, become more fresh for any other labour: so our charge being shaken of[f], we shalbe fitte for greater matters” (1.0.27-29). There is an implicit gesture toward youthful transitions in this his first play: the plays, like the fauna here listed, will mature over time.¹² But the suggestion that this play is a “charge” to be shaken off connotes obligation that, in its fulfillment, paves the way toward “greater matters.” This conception of play writing as a “charge” or obligation may be at the root of Lyly's petitions to Elizabeth and Robert Cecil c.1591 in which he refers to “his many yeares servyce” in the former (1.70-1) and

¹² This is the same image that he uses in the letter to Cecil (22 Dec 1597) in which the sense is that, if the Queen “will vouchsafe but any hope of favor in my declining years” then he—like this shedding of old burdens—renew himself for renewed service (Bond, 1:69).

“13 yeres servic” in the latter (Bond 1.395).¹³ Taken together, the intimations of sacrifice and obligation that underlie Lyly’s play-making process might best be framed as performing a service for the crown. Plays become a courtly duty for Lyly as integral to his advancement and persona as his performance of humility; more importantly for Lyly, the plays seem to be framed as exchangeable for “greater matters.”

As has been suggested above, Lyly generally displays two different modes of prologic rhetoric: controlling in his non-court prologues and deferential in those for the court. What becomes clear is that all of his prologic framing is in the interest of advancement, which he maps out in the prologue to *Gallathea*: “Your Majesties judgement and favour, are our Sunne and shadowe, the one comming of your deepe wisdom, the other of your wonted grace. Wee in all humilitie desire, that by the former, receiving our first breath, we may in the latter, take our last rest” (1.0.3-7). Clearly the rhetorical emphasis on courtly humility is in play in this prologue, and there is a good deal of hyperbole built into idea that the prologic voice lives and dies with the Queen. On the rhetorical level, we see that the structural alignment of “judgement” with “wisdom” and of “favour” with “grace” demonstrate how the actors have been given life “by the former”—i.e., a chance to perform—and that they hope that the shadow of her Majesty’s grace shades their last rest, when the show ends and the characters, as it were,

¹³ The question of what constitutes Lyly’s claims of royal “service” is debatable. Critics often attempt, as I do here, to contextualize his service in terms of his plays; but they are troubled by the fact that there is an apparent dramatic silence between c.1593 (or earlier) and the late 1590s, early 1600s when these petitions were penned. Bond and Hotson suggest that his “service,” then, was in the organization of courtly entertainments as Elizabeth traveled the realm; it was something of a consolation for losing the boy acting troupes. Scragg suggests that, while he may have had a hand in a limited number of these entertainments, his “service” might be better understood as his political service as a Member of Parliament for various locales for the four successive meetings of Parliament over the last decade of the 90s: 1588-89, 1592-93, 1597-98, and 1601.

melt away. Read in light of the Lylian persona, however, the scope widens: the Queen's approval ("judgement") of his early plays allowed him to continue. Moreover, the playwright's desire to take his last rest having gained the "favor" of the Queen may be somewhat less than figurative.

In Lyly's apparent quest for the Queen's favor he constructs a relationship with Elizabeth that is modeled on a type of patronage system in which he trades his service for ascension in the court.¹⁴ Of course Elizabeth did not officially patronize Lyly, although he was paid for his court presentations of *Campaspe* and *Sapho and Phao*, for example, from royal coffers. In these early plays Lyly's official patron was Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and it is through this association that Lyly was able to acquire a lease on the first Blackfriars. Nevertheless, through his predilection for hyperbolic humility and his insistence on the inherent value of his dramatic work—mirth and matter—the playwright seems, especially in these courtly prologues, to put forth the notion that in giving his plays to the Queen he was deserving of something in return. This is to say that Lyly does not simply view his plays as unfettered gifts, but rather as ones that carry with them the burden of recompense;¹⁵ he freely intermingles his literary

¹⁴ Bourdieu's discussion of symbolic capital lurks in the margins here. The notion is defined as a popular, public support that can be, as it were, cashed-in for political power and as such it would seem to work best in a democratic system in which a collective directly paves the avenues toward political positions; however, Lyly seems to manipulate the monarchy in such a way as to exude a sense similar to that of "popular support." That is, in his performances of humility and professions of his plays' worth, Lyly affects the accoutrements of early modern capital that might typically translate into political preferment.

¹⁵I am thinking here of Derrida's assertion that the "gift" is "the impossible": in *Given Time* he argues that the given never exists outside of the circular economic structure of disbursal and return—the given is always fraught with this obligation of the return in one way or another—and thus the true gift can only ever exist in its non existence (i.e., only insofar as it is never acknowledged as such by either the donee or the donor). In framing the play-as-given in this way I want to capture this sense of return, both in terms of gain and of obligation (or *engagement* as Derrida would have), that giving carries.

creations with his ambitions, creating a coalescence that epitomizes an authorially possessive persona.

Lyly's strategies, coupled with the successes of his court plays, seem to have paid dividends since sometime around 1588 the Queen, by her owne "gratious favour" seems to have suggested that he "should ayme all [his] Courses at the Revells," as we read in the first of Lyly's personal petitions to Elizabeth for preferment (Bond 1:65). Of course Lyly's letter might represent a skewed version of the consequentiality of Elizabeth's suggestions: Lyly himself shies from using the term "promises"—"I dare not saye, with a promise, butt a hopefull Item, of the Reversion"¹⁶—and, as Chambers notes, it was apparently not Elizabeth's style to ensure the revels reversion to anyone with any certainty, as even George Buc, the eventual Master, seemed somewhat unsure of his standing (*Elizabethan* 1:99). However, an insinuation by the Queen that a prolific court playwright might garner some sort of reward for his labor is not out of the realm of possibility. A suggestion of gaining the reversion of the Mastership of the Revels in 1588 would have been an affirmation of what Carter A. Daniel has described as Lyly's courtly phase, culminating as the period does with the performance of *Endymion* in February of that very year. The rhetorical framing with which Lyly had labored over the first four years of his dramatic career appears to have paid off with this suggestion.

¹⁶ Interestingly, though, in a (probably related) letter to Cecil from around 1599-1600 (incorrectly dated 22 Dec 1597), he refers to "her ma[jes]ties promises," "her gracious promises," and proclaims that "her ma[jes]tie hath p'mised much and done nothing" (Bond 1.68-9). Certainly Lyly considers the Queen's insinuations to be "promises;" or at least he recognizes the rhetorical value of framing them, for Cecil, as "promises." I would suggest that this letter—if my assumption about its inaccurate date is correct—would be a direct precursor to Lyly's latter petition to the Queen and in trying to secure Cecil's support in his efforts. It does not seem unlikely that the rhetorician would overplay his hand; nor that he would underplay it in deference to the Queen. If the (as it were) truth of Lyly's sentiment lay to some degree between the two poles, then Lyly at the very least wanted to collect whatever it was that the Queen intimated he might have.

The hope that he might one day become the Master of the Revels seems to have affected an increased authorial confidence that is noteworthy in Lyly's approach to dramatic production after 1588. In her defense of Lyly's abilities as a dramatist, Leah Scragg argues that he continually adapted his dramatic style over the course of his career, efforts that culminate with and are epitomized in *Woman in the Moon* (1593, 1597). She demonstrates that Lyly changed his style in order to keep pace with trends in dramatic development and with popular tastes; this shift is exemplified by a decline in his use of euphuism in his plays, an inversely proportional increase in the prominence of the comic subplot and servant characters, and, in *Woman*, an experiment with blank verse.¹⁷ This arc of adaptation, of course, does not in itself indicate an increase in authorial confidence, for it could just as easily point up Lyly's clambering efforts to stay apace on his path to preferment. Whatever the impetus, there is a marked shift in Lyly's authorial persona between his earlier and later plays from deferentiality to authorial possessiveness. The prologues to *Campaspe*, *Sapho and Phao*, *Gallathea*, and *Endymion*—both court and non-court—are marked by a subtle concentration of plural pronouns, particularly “we” and “our.” The Paul's prologue to *Midas*, however, even while following these earlier prologues' approaches to deferring responsibility, insists that the play is “our Author's device” (1.0.22). Coming in the last moments of the prologue, this line draws upon the prologue's earlier reference to the “device” of the intricately woven arras that stood, in part, for dramatic innovations: while the playwright has heretofore hidden within the collective “we” or “our,” the *Midas* prologue marks a

¹⁷ Scragg, “Victim of Fashion” (passim); Scragg, *Woman in the Moon*, introduction (passim).

remarkable shift to acknowledging that the design of the play—the “device” or intricate gimmick of it—is the responsibility of the (albeit) “idle” author of the play. The result is that the figure of the playwright is distinguished from the collective producers of the play.

The prologue to *The Woman in the Moon* follows *Midas* in bringing the figure of the playwright into the limelight (as it were), but more than simply highlighting his functional role this later prologue insists that responsibility for the play rests solely on the author’s shoulders. One may recall the manner in which Lyly apparently cedes interpretive agency of, for example, *Campaspe*, *Sapho and Phao*, and *Gallathea* by insisting that interpretation, for good or ill, lay in the Queen’s mind’s eye, suggesting that the plays are but dreams. In the prologue to *Woman in the Moon*, imaginative responsibility shifts to the playwright. This sentiment reverberates through the prologic voice’s insistence that the play is nothing if not the dream of “Our Poet slumbring in the Muse’s lap” (1.0.1) and, therefore, that “all is but a Poets dreame” (1.0.17). Of course part of the design here is to emphasize the fact that this is Lyly’s first foray into blank verse, and that he is becoming, specifically, a “poet”: this “dream” is “The first he had in Phœbus’ holy bowre, / But not the last, unlesse the first displeas” (1.0.18-19). To be sure, pointing out his experiment in style may be read as another humble deflection of a potentially offensive effort toward the ethereal auspices of the gods’ holy bower or “the Muses lap.” If, however, Lyly’s proclivity for rhetorical control in the prologues for the private playspaces might come to bear on our reading of this play, which was likely performed in Paul’s like *Midas*, then we might begin to see in this maneuver an

appropriation of the interpretative agency that Lyly had previously granted to the Queen herself.¹⁸ This is to suggest that in what may have been Lyly's last play we can see not only what Leah Scragg recognizes as sophisticated experimentation but also a pointed exemplification of the playwright's confidence.

In spite of this confidence, the *Woman in the Moon* is in fact one of Lyly's last plays and the last to spring from Phoebus' bower, a fact that leads one to believe that this foray into blank verse did in fact displease its audience. The end of Lyly's dramatic output inauspiciously coincides with his failure to secure the Mastership of the Revels: the patent for the reversion is granted to Buc on 21 July 1603, but the fact that this event was eminent was clear to Lyly by 1600 and possibly as early as 1597.¹⁹ The decline in production and the loss of the reversion—both of which occur in the 1590s—have led critics to interpret a downward spiral at this point in the playwright's narrative. G. K. Hunter asserts that Lyly, unable to adapt to the changing times, is a “victim of fashion” as English theater grows into its own and leaves his rhetorical, prosaic style behind (257-97). Scragg defends Lyly on this point, framing him not as a victim of fashion but as a victim of censorship: she suggests that his hand in the Marprelate controversy and his association with the child actors led to a period of demise.²⁰ Pincombe paints a more sinister image of Lyly, whose subtle critiques of the cult of Eliza speak to his

¹⁸ This prologue is not, unlike all of his other prologues, marked as to where it would have been performed. Because the prologue—like the play—is not especially flattering to the Queen (which is discussed in more depth immediately below) and because it does not seem to be offered to her in any way save the title page, this seems most likely a prologue for the private playspace. What's more, the prologic voice asks “That in your forehead she [i.e. Nature] may read content” (1.0.15): this is the kind of focus on visible markers of approval does not seem appropriate for the court (the idea that someone would find a window to the Queen's soul through her furrowed brow does not seem prudent).

¹⁹ Evidence for Lyly's knowledge prior to public announcement is the Lyly letter that is (spuriously?) dated 1597.

²⁰ Scragg, “Victim of Fashion” (passim).

disillusionment with and abandonment of the court's ideologies. In one way or another, though, all of these critics frame the latter period of Lyly's literary career as somehow lacking; he is always a victim of something. Such readings, no doubt, are predicated in part upon Lyly's own admission that he "aymed all [his] Courses, Att the Revells" (Bond 1.65) and woefully fell short.

I would like to suggest that Lyly's failure to gain the Revels reversion is much less a victimization of Lyly than it is an affirmation of the Elizabethan political system and the role of the theater within that system: the fact of the matter is that George Buc was simply better connected than Lyly could have ever hoped to have been.²¹ One manner in which Buc makes Lyly's claim to the Mastership particularly difficult was the former's close association with Charles Howard the Lord Admiral, who in turn was closely aligned with Robert Cecil: given the fact that Howard had already petitioned Cecil for a post for Buc in 1595, it is not altogether clear that Lyly's numerous petitions to Cecil did not fall on deaf ears since the more-powerful Howard had designs for one of his own loyal attendants. Buc was not a man of the theater and, rather, benefitted from noticeable political service; that the appointment would eventually fall to him confirms W. R. Streitberger's assertion that "changes in the Revels Office from the late 1570s to the end of Elizabeth's reign were oriented toward achieving economy, toward making

²¹ Buc was closely associated with Charles Howard of Effingham, who was the First Earl of Nottingham, eventually the Lord Admiral, and most importantly a close acquaintance of Elizabeth. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, he was "one of her closest male companions" (318). Edmund Tilney, the Master of the Revels in Lyly's lifetime, also shared this association with Howard, possibly strengthening Buc's claim in the vein of precedent. As early as 1595 Howard had Buc in mind for advancements, writing to his ally Robert Cecil in recommendation of Buc for service to her Majesty as either the French Secretary or the Clerk of the Signet (Eccles 426). While he gained neither of those posts, Buc accompanied the Lord Admiral to Cadiz in 1596 and appears to have actually been dispatched with a message for the Queen from the deployed Howard and Essex.

practical political use of the Master, and toward bringing him closer to the centre of power” (228). Indeed, Howard was himself considered to be among Elizabeth’s dearest friends, bringing Buc, by association, much closer to the center of the Elizabethan power structure.

Of course Lyly’s loss of the Revels reversion is not the only moment of misfortune in his narrative: he seems to cease completely dramatic production after the early 1590s, probably as early as 1591.²² Lyly scholars have understood the lack of Lylian plays in these last fifteen years as a void that requires explanation. Bond for example suggests that “the improbable silence of his last fifteen years” might be filled by the assertion that Lyly acted as a consultant of sorts for the various noblemen who desired to entertain the Queen, writing speeches and designing pageants for the regent’s processions through the countryside (1:404-09). To Bond’s list of eight entertainments in which Lyly may have had a hand, Hotson adds two more and suggests that “if he was not in demand as a playwright, Lyly was still the choice for devising a dialogue to entertain the Queen and her court” (5). Scragg offers an alternative to Lyly’s staying dramatically active by suggesting that the playwright busied himself as a part-time writer and part-time Member of Parliament, thus redefining his “service” as civil as opposed to literary: she notes that he is listed in the roles for all of the Elizabethan Parliaments

²² The boy players were disbanded in 1591. Most have argued that at least *Woman in the Moon* was written after this date for the adult companies, representing Lyly’s efforts to shift his focus. Scragg, in her edition of the play, is most convincing in her conviction that *Woman in the Moon* was actually written for boy actors as well, and therefore in or around 1591.

during the last years of his life.²³ Given Lyly's prior success in the theater, critics are inclined toward triangulated speculation as to his pursuits in these last years.

Fueling speculation, of course, is the fact that a number of Lyly's letters—mostly to Robert Cecil but also to the Queen—survive from this period, and all of them in one way or another petition for or complain about position and rank. Like the letter to Cecil in 1594, with which I opened this chapter, all of these letters steer their modern readers toward a rather lamentable picture of the playwright. As that letter indicates, Lyly appears unable to snatch the opportunity, as it were, for advancement. In this particular letter he complains of some unspecified bar to his advancement, signaling that he was actively seeking—through his skills, it would seem—to procure a place of honor in or near Elizabeth's court. However, Lyly's most prevalent complaint—mentioned in three of the six extant letters to Cecil that Bond prints, and in both of those to the Queen—is the notion that he has provided service to the Queen for ten to thirteen years.²⁴ These letters indeed speak to Lyly's agonizing patience with the proroguing of the Queen's promises, and scholars have taken these Lylian lamentations alongside the end of the otherwise prolific dramatic career to be determinate evidence of a fall from grace. Bond, Pincombe, and Scragg all suggest that Lyly, either by his own doing or not, fell from the Queen's good graces at some point in the early half of the 1590s: how else does one explain, they ask, such a reversal of fortune.

²³ Lyly was a Member of Parliament in 1589, 1593, 1597-8, and 1601. He was not elected in 1604, the first under James I which held five sessions in seven years.

²⁴ Again, the range of dates is due to the unsettled dating of his petitions.

We might instead read these letters as we read Lyly's prologues: as exercises in rhetorical manipulation. A clear example of Lyly's dependence upon rhetorical flourishes in his correspondence is found in his second petition. To be sure, any document that has been labeled as a "petition" can be seen as an exercise in argument, and Lyly's position—explicitly vis-à-vis, in this case, preferment—is that he has paid his debt and is owed recompense: "Thirteen years, your Highnes Servant; But; yett noethinge [...] A thowsand hopes, but all, noethinge; A hundred promises, butt yet noethinge" (Bond 1:70-71). More than simply making an argument, however, Lyly also displays his skills as a euphuist, and, in a manner of speaking, reminds the Queen of the skills that have won him favor in the past:

Tyme; cannott work my petic[i]ons, nor my petic[i]ons the tyme; After many yeares servyce; it pleased your Majestie To except; against Tentcs and Toyles, I wishe; that ffor Tentcs I might putt in Tenem^{tes} [i.e. Tenements] : soe should I bee eased with some Toyles; some Landes some goodes, ffynes, or ffoffeytures, that should ffall, by the just fall of the most ffalce Traytors; That seeing noethinge will come by the Revells, I may praye uppon the Rebels. (Bond 1:70)

The chiasmus of the first line of the letter, expressing dismay at the disappointments through— and the limits of—time, gives way to a string of wordplay on the office of Tents and Toils, a lower position within the Revels office which Lyly seems either to have been denied ("except[ed] against") or dismissed from ("after many years servyce").²⁵ His ultimate request—to be afforded some of the spoils confiscated from Essex and his cohort in the wake of his rebellion—calls attention to a semantic and visual pun between "tent" and the abbreviated form of "tenement," and plays upon the

²⁵ The Office of Tents and Toils was the amalgamation of two lower positions in the Office of the Revels. The two were brought together in the interest of consolidating power and simplifying the Revels office. Cf. Streitberger.

two inherent meanings of “Toyles:” as he refers to its contextual use as the term for the trappings of royal hunting excursions (from which costumes and props were plundered) he also suggests that, if granted “tenements,” his own pecuniary toils might be alleviated.²⁶ The alliteration of the penultimate sentiment—fines, forfeitures, fall, fall, false—guides the reader toward the sight rhyme between “Revells” and “Rebells” that at once punctuates the request and reminds the Queen of her debt to the playwright. I belabor this description so as to accentuate how this passage in the letter to Elizabeth is nothing if not highly stylized and intricately constructed; as he did in his prologic spaces, Lyly continues to peddle his signature euphuism as work worthy of recompense.

As a further example of Lyly’s rhetorical exercises in his letters, and one which makes the connection to his prologic spaces even more explicit, is a later specimen addressed to Robert Cecil from 1597 in which Lyly admits “I find it folly that on[e] foot being in the grave, I shuld have the other on the stage” (Bond 1:69). Scholars have taken this to indicate that at this late date Lyly must, in some capacity, have been employed in dramatic pursuits, hence the critical assumption that he was working on pageants. While it may be the case that he was, in fact, involved in the theater in some capacity and that, additionally, he resented such employment, it may also be the case that this is simply another instance of overstated humility similar to those that one sees in the courtly prologues. To wit, this is a letter in which Lyly proclaims that he “will Cast [his] wittes

²⁶ Whether or not Lyly had any pecuniary concerns is debatable. It has been suggested that Lyly is so adamant in these petitions later in his life because he was in fact destitute: he wanted the Revels reversion because it was a paid position as opposed to an honorary one. Moreover, if he was trying his entire life to live the life of the courtier, such pursuits could get expensive. It is also not unreasonable to think that, if he viewed Elizabeth’s suggestion that the Mastership would fall to him as a promise, he may very well have overextended himself to creditors in trying to gain proximity to the court.

in a new mould, & turne the water Course by some contrary Sluce” (Bond 1:68-9); furthermore, using images reminiscent of those found in *Campaspe* to indicate a transitional “fit[ness] for greater matters,” Lyly shall “with the Snake cast of[f] my skynne, & my Byll with the Eagle” (Bond 1:69). Lyly is offering to change his spots, as it were, but he does not indicate a retrospective revulsion toward his dramatic career any more in 1597-1600 than he did in 1584 at the outset of his career. Instead he simply announces, in both instances, that plays are a means to an end. At the risk of banal understatement, his foot is no more “on the stage” than his other is “in the grave”; rather, both function metaphorically and rhetorically as indications of where he is heading (the grave) and from whence he has come (the stage). Lyly’s humility in this moment is directed by his compulsory self-abnegation; the theater—now as before—is framed as unworthy only as a gesture toward, paradoxically, its value for the playwright’s authorial persona.

What we see, then, is an affinity between the playwright’s personal—though certainly not private—correspondence and his prologic spaces: in both arenas Lyly works to construct and rely upon his humble, adept authorial persona. Because the playwright wants his euphuistic skills to win him favor, he constantly labors to bring them into the purview of the audience, whether that audience is the drama-consuming public, the theater-going regent, the commonplace book writer, or the reading Queen. The interplay between Lyly’s letters and his prologic spaces speaks to the degree to which we might see the prologic space as inherently authorial: certainly Lyly saw his prologic spaces as opportunities to construct an authorial persona that would form the

basis of his claims to upward mobility in the Elizabethan socio-political structure. Indeed the prologue to Lyly's *Woman in the Moon* seems to articulate precisely the sentiment that the prologic space is more than simply an entrée into the world of the play but, significantly, an avenue for authorial expression:

This, but the shadow of our Authors dreame,
 Argues the substance to be neere at hand:
 At whose appearance I most humbly crave,
 That in your forehead she may read content. (1.0.12-15)

The deictic “this” may seem at first glance to refer to the play in general; we are reminded of Lyly's own assertion that, pending contentment, *Sapho* was only a dream. However, “this [...] argues the substance to be neere at hand,” a construction that clearly marks “this” as a precursor to the “substance” of the dream that is about to appear: “lovely Nature” being the “substance” who will be reading the theater-goers' foreheads. Importantly the prologue is here framed as a *shadow*—only a darkened silhouette—that will gain more detailed “substance” as the play begins; but like the shadow, the prologue apes the thing itself, haunting the play proper long after Nature, in this case, ascends the stage. For it is in this prologue that the audience learns that this is an author's play, and provided the playwright's insistent authorial self-constructions, we might assume that they knew it to be John Lyly's play.

The Lylian Legacy

If Lyly labored to construct and project the persona of a playwright both skilled in terms of dramatic production and aware of courtly ritual and protocol, then his success in creating this “John Lyly” should not only be measured through his correspondence

with the Queen but also by taking stock of how others have perceived this persona. If one examines, for example, the fourteen quarto editions of his plays—all of which were published between 1584 and 1601 and do not, save *Woman in the Moon* (1597) and *Love's Metamorphosis* (1601), acknowledge his authorship—one might discern that Lyly had some success in constructing a certain proximity to the Queen's "center of power" even if he was not close enough to gain the Mastership of the Revels. With striking consistency, the title pages to Lyly's quartos boast of performance before the Queen; considered in the context of the 127 single-play playbooks published during this period—only twenty-five of which similarly boast of their being presented to the Queen—the significance of Lyly's eleven (44% of that subtotal) is clearer. Considering the quartos as commodities, it appears as though the title pages to Lyly's plays are selling the sense of sharing in the experience of a courtly performance. Such marketing is also evident when one considers that, of the 127 single-play playbooks published in the seventeen years between 1584 and 1601, only fourteen provide a specific date (e.g. "New Yeare's Daye at Night") for their performance and ten of those (71%) are Lyly's plays.²⁷ Such a consistent break from convention in this case should not be considered a sign of Lyly's hand in the printing of his plays—such possessive authorship would not enter the picture for another fifteen to twenty years—nor can it be attributed to the predilections of a given printer—six different publishers and seven different printers had stakes at various times in the printing of Lyly quartos.²⁸ This demonstrates that Lyly's

²⁷ Statistics gathered from Farmer and Lesser, *DEEP*, 14-15 July 2009.

²⁸ The printers are Thomas Dawson, Thomas Orwin, John Charlewood, Thomas Scarlett, Thomas Creede, James Roberts, and Simon Stafford. The publishers: Thomas Cadman, William Broome, Joan Broome, Cuthbert Burby, William Jones, and William Wood (Lesser and Farmer, *DEEP*).

plays were commercially viable as relics of very specific performances: put another way, these quarto title pages seem to be selling an experience shared by the Queen herself, and Lyly's plays almost immediately became a vehicle for that experience.

In the first collection of Lyly's plays, published in 1632, Edmund Blount also attempts to capitalize on a connection between the dedicatee, Richard Lumley, and the deceased Queen Elizabeth. Although Blount admits to Lumley that Lyly's plays might "not sute so well with your more serious contemplation" (Bond 3:2), he opens the dedication with the reminder that Lyly's "tunes alighted in the Eares of a great and ever-famous Queene: his Invention, was so curiously strung, that *Elizaes* Court held his notes in Admiration" (Bond 3:2). In this way Blount forges a proximal relationship between his noble dedicatee, the first Viscount of Waterford, and the "ever-famous" Elizabeth. By contrast, Blount's note "To The Reader," while mentioning that Lyly was "a Rare and Excellent Poet, whome Queene Elizabeth then heard, Graced, and Rewarded" (Bond 3:2), aims instead to market the volume as a collection that, for all intents and purposes, is new to the reader. Blount stresses, in this more general context, that he has "(for the love I beare to Posteritie) dig'd up the Grave" of the playwright, "gathered the scattered branches [i.e. 'dead Lawrels'] up, and by a Charme (gotten from Apollo) made them greene againe" (Bond 3:2-3). Because Lyly's plays had been neither in repertories nor print since 1601, Blount is able to play the hero to posterity and re-present "these Rare Monuments of wit" to a public that had virtually forgotten this "sonne of the Muses" (Bond 3:3). Hubristic though it may be—Blount concludes: "And thank mee, that brings him to thy Acquaintance"—Lyly's first editor accentuates a primary aspect of the Lylian

persona when he speaks of Lyly's skills as a euphuist. Furthermore, the dedication to Lumley begins by pointing out Lyly's proximity to Elizabeth. These moments, in accentuating both Lyly's euphuism and his proximity to the Queen, do not only resurrect Lyly's works but also his authorial persona as a skilled and favored rhetorician and playwright. This is to suggest that it is not coincidence that the terms with which Blount praises Lyly are the very terms with which the playwright sought to define himself in his prologues.

Of course the fact that Blount has to rescue Lyly's plays, which otherwise would "be acted by none but wormes" (Bond 3.3), and that the playwright's playbooks were out of wide circulation for the first three decades of the seventeenth century belie a fading of what must have been a once-bright aura. *Euphues*'s publication tallies, the printings of his early plays, and the fact that he was able to petition the Queen directly all speak to a certain level of renown. Indeed Blount's assertion that the Queen "heard, Graced, and Rewarded" the playwright implies that his suit for loot confiscated from Essex may, in fact, have been answered. The question of whether his plays fell out of style or he miscalculated the effects of his involvement with the Marprelate controversy will endure. Perhaps it is because of his early success and apparent esteem that scholars work so hard to make sense of this apparent fall from grace; but trying to fill the gaps in Lyly's literary and personal biography may overlook Lyly's success in framing the very terms of such endeavors. Just as his construction of an authorial persona guided his audiences toward readings of the plays and of his socio-political position as their author, and just as the quarto title pages and Blount's 1632 edition provide contemporary

validation of Lyly's goal of garnering royal favor with this persona, so too does Lyly lead modern critics to judge the elusive connections between his life and his works in terms of success or failure at court or in the theater. This is to say that, in framing Lyly as a "victim"—of fashion, of censorship, even of politics—is to misperceive the Lylian project; for he did not just want to gain favor, but to construct an authorial persona that elicited the sense that, because of his service as a playwright, he deserved preferment. His petitions to Cecil and to Elizabeth say as much; likewise, his prologic spaces manipulate generic conventions to accentuate his plays' value and his role as both humble author and skilled euphuist. Scholars ask why Lyly did not ultimately gain the Revels office, or they search for what led to "the improbable silence of his last fifteen years"; instead we should ask why *these* are the questions that frame our critical understanding of Lyly. The answer is the essence of what I understand to be the Lylian project: the calculated construction of his authorial persona frames our modern questions just as it framed those of his contemporaries.

All of this is to say that Lyly grasped the tenuous nature of the Elizabethan moment. He seems to have intuited that he had an opportunity to rise, and he worked throughout his career to manipulate the socio-political structure that was in place; nor is it insignificant that he recognized his ability to affect such change by shaping others' perceptions of him through a manufactured persona. Lyly sought to legitimize himself by concurrently legitimizing the dramatic production to which he pinned his hopes in the early 1580s. He struggles, then, with the prevailing prejudices against plays and playwrights, and he faces these very specific authorial anxieties in the only authorial

space available to him, the prologues to his plays; his prologic spaces, then, lay the foundation for his petitions for royal preferment. Through his construction of an authorial persona that was protective of its literary achievements and insistent on the plays' inherent value to society, Lyly—for better or worse—defines the terms of his legacy.

As a contrast to the formal consistency in Lyly's prologues, the next chapter examines those of Shakespeare, for whom no two exemplars are alike in form. Indeed it is because of this variety that we can say that Shakespeare is experimental in his approach to prologues. Lyly, marking a transitional moment in early modern theater history, appropriates the conventions of his dramatic forebears; but the ultimate achievement of his dramatic career is in utilizing an intrinsic prologic authority to construct his authorial persona. He makes the prologue personal. Shakespeare benefits from a more established theater institution and what we see in his prologues, instead of an anxiety over the terms in which his works are interpreted, is a direct engagement with his audiences on the very terms of their interpretation.

CHAPTER IV

“WE SHALL KNOW BY THIS FELLOW”:

INTERPRETING SHAKESPEARE’S PROLOGIC SPACES

The London playgoer hearing *Troilus and Cressida* (1602, 1609) at the Globe in 1602 is very likely to have detected in the play’s prologue a reference to Ben Jonson’s *Poetaster* (1601, 1602) which had been on the Blackfriars stage only a year or so before. One of the opening volleys in the so-called Poet’s War, *Poetaster* is characteristic of a Jonsonian expansion of the space: a personified Envy enters “as Prologue” (1.0a.18)¹ and proceeds to chastise the playwright, attempting to recruit the audience to “help me damn the author” (1.0a.46), before a second “armed Prologue” (1.0b.6) comes to the defense of “our author” (1.0b.15). Contrary to Jonson’s Prologue, who is armed for a figurative fight with Envy, *Troilus*’s Prologue comes “not in confidence / Of author’s pen or actor’s voice, but suited / In like conditions as our argument” (1.0.25).² Thus Shakespeare’s Prologue decries metatheatrical melodrama and is instead “suited” for a play set amid the Trojan War: playing on two senses of “suited,” he is both “fittingly costumed” and “appropriate for” the play’s governing themes. According to James Bednarz this intertextuality speaks to Shakespeare’s entanglement in this Poet’s War that raged in the background—and often in the foreground—of the plays written by Jonson, Shakespeare, and John Marston around the turn of the century. Of course the claim that

¹ Citations from Jonson are from G. A. Wilkes’s Cambridge edition. *Poetaster*, having two prologues, requires the further “scene” descriptions “a” and “b” to indicate each in turn.

² Unless otherwise noted, citations from Shakespeare’s plays are from Greenblatt, *Norton Shakespeare* with act, scene, and line cited parenthetically. In the interest of consistency, I number prologues and choruses as scene 0 (zero).

the *Troilus* prologue is detached from his “author’s pen or actor’s voice” is somewhat disingenuous, as the speaker onstage is always already inscribed by both of these subjectivities. Moreover, in making such a claim—one that is designed to conjure the image of the precedent *Poetaster* prologue—Shakespeare’s prologue relies upon an intertextuality that lay soundly outside of the fictional play world. That is to say that *Troilus*’s prologue is predicated upon an understanding of the two plays as constructs of their respective authors; for the parody in Shakespeare’s reference to *Poetaster* to succeed, the playwright requires that his audience recall the earlier play, to recall specifically the Jonsonian defensiveness, and to assimilate their understanding of *Troilus* with their memory of the antecedent *Poetaster*. Shakespeare’s prologue to *Troilus*, then, does not didactically justify the inherent value of drama as we have seen in the interludes and in Lyly’s prologues, but instead draws its audience into a play that is a synecdoche of the Poet’s War itself: a thinly veiled intermingling of fiction and reality.

Reading the *Poetaster* and *Troilus* prologues as intertexts demonstrates how the latter forges a connection between its audience and a playwright who is always outside of—if you will, behind—the physical manifestation of the Prologue onstage. In requiring that an audience draw upon their prior knowledge, the prologue constructs a metatheatrical, communal knowledge—knowledge of these plays, as such, in conversation with one another—shared by the auditor and the author exclusive of the Prologue, whose ontological self-awareness is questionable at best.³ Moreover, in

³ While it may be argued that this is an exclusionary move that limits access to the humor of the joke, it seems much more likely that the assumption was that a majority of the audience would “get” the reference: the theater was at least in part commercially driven and to exclude any significant proportion would have no doubt cut into profit margins and dismayed the shareholders, Shakespeare included.

forging this bond and in asking the audience to integrate and conceptualize the two plays simultaneously, the prologue to *Troilus* implicates the audience in Shakespeare's critique of Jonson's authorial defensiveness. This intertextual war/game creates something of an "inside joke" at Jonson's expense and thus implies that the prologic space is ill-suited to venting authorial concerns. The nature of the critique, however, directed as it is toward a fellow playwright, is itself an authorial suggestion of what should be considered appropriate for prologues. Simply stated, in chastising Jonson's expression of authorial self-interest in his prologic space, and in inviting the audience to censure him as well, Shakespeare himself uses his *Troilus* prologue to self-interested ends.

What one sees in the *Troilus* prologue, then, is Shakespeare constructing an authorial persona, albeit subtly, in contradistinction to Jonson. Indeed, in Bednarz's estimation these prologues "originated the legend of [the playwrights'] wit-combats," a legend that would dominate the critical understanding of their relationship for more than four hundred years (262). For example, in the prologic voice's resignation in the closing lines of *Troilus*'s prologue—as the voice invites the audience to "Like or find fault; do as your pleasures are; / Now, good or bad, 'tis but the chance of war" (1.0.30-31)—Bednarz sees the Prologue as "Shakespeare's uncommitted spokesman:" "a figure of subversive relativity operating in a world where theatrical success, like war, was a matter of chance" (259). Thus Shakespeare's armed Prologue, as a parody of Jonson's, gives the lie to the assumption that an "armed" authorial, prologic figure could adequately

Instead, this prologue to *Troilus* assumes the audience's cognitive participation in this intertextual, inter-authorial discourse by requiring that they assimilate their knowledge of an event outside of the current play-space and -time with the prologue to *Troilus*.

defend the ensuing play from public opinion. One might also note that in denying the Jonsonian defense against the avatars of criticism Shakespeare (appropriately) panders to his audience's role in theatrical production. However, locating "theatrical success" in the judging audience—insofar as they "like or find fault"—is not the same as the simple matter of chance that Shakespeare lets on. Bednarz understandably sees the contrast between Jonson's attempted control and Shakespeare's avowed surrender to happenstance as the defining difference between the two playwrights. It seems reasonable to consider that in his prologic space Shakespeare constructs that difference in terms of his conceptualization of the audience: what Jonson views as a contentious force, Shakespeare sees as constructive and collaborative. Shakespeare thus frames his authorial relationship with the audience vis-à-vis Jonson, and instead of heading off interpretation—either through figurative force in Jonson or rhetorical suggestion in Lyly—Shakespeare allows his audience to "Like *or* find fault" as they follow their pleasures.

None of this is to suggest that Shakespeare relinquishes this play in particular—or indeed any of his plays—either to chance or to the audience's whim. In *Troilus* these notions seem inextricably linked, leading to a sense of utter arbitrariness in the audience's rendering of the play. To read in this way, though, is to perpetuate the Jonsonian model of the audience as a many-headed beast that lacks consensus. While it may be the case that individual auditors left to their own devices might arrive at different opinions of the play at hand, the individual judgments are not, in fact, the product of chance but rather the result of subjective interpretation. Recognizing this, we can see

Shakespeare, in his prologic spaces, incorporating the fact that audiences actively participate in meaning-making. Shakespeare is careful not to leave such agency unchecked, however, and we will see the playwright's authorial possessiveness manifest itself not as an overzealous exercise of authorial control but in the understated manipulation of the audience's internalized conception of the prologic space. As we see in *Troilus*, for example, the "inside joke" works because the audience—as much as the playwrights—recognize the prologic space as a site for authorial claims. By shifting the focus only slightly—retaining the authorial nature of the prologic space while introducing the audience's stake—Shakespeare creates a space in which his auditors take an active and acknowledged role in productions.

In what follows I will trace Shakespeare's prologic manipulation through his sparse exempla of the form. The scarcity of prologues in Shakespeare's corpus might lead one to consider them mere novelties, but to overlook them misses an opportunity to understand the playwright's carefully considered engagement with the form and, more importantly, to understand how the early modern period's most prolific playwright conceived of his position as an author. Unlike Lyly's, for example, Shakespeare's prologic spaces are neither thematically nor formally consistent, thus demonstrating a playful, experimental approach to them. It should be noted, however, that whether they are inset metatheatrical glimpses like the prologue to Hamlet's version of the *Murder of Gonzago*, or protracted discursive forays into the form like the choric figure in *Henry V*, all of Shakespeare's prologic spaces demonstrate an investment in the audience's role in the performance and Shakespeare's subtle manipulation of that agency. In fact, I will

begin by examining moments in which we can see play audiences interacting with prologues as a means to better understand how Shakespeare imagines this interaction. Additionally, I find in the distances between the first two quartos of *Romeo and Juliet* another instance of audience interaction: as the first quarto (Q1) derives from a performance, we can trace in its features a specific act of interpretation on a Shakespearean prologic space. These explorations of how Shakespeare and his contemporaries envisioned prologues guides the readings, in the chapter's concluding section, of *2 Henry IV*'s personified Rumour and, subsequently, *Henry V*'s Chorus. In reading these latter examples I hope to demonstrate that engaging with Shakespeare's prologues will help us to see that he not only manipulated the audience's understanding of theatrical convention, but that he used that manipulation to move the audiences toward a measured, subjective engagement with the institution of playing: ultimately the audience must consider what it means to have interpretive agency, how far that agency extends, and where to locate the limits of narrative in the necessarily liminal domain of the theater.

Prologic Encounters

If we are to understand Shakespeare's use of the prologic space, one helpful arena of exploration would be to examine how he stages audiences' interpretive practices. In this I do not intend to study Hamlet's engagement with "words, words, words" so much as his reaction to—that is, his "reading" of—the traveling players' performance of his adapted *Murder of Gonzago*, an example to which I will return momentarily. Taken with a wider lens, moments of interpretation such as this from

Hamlet (1601, 1603) and, as another example, the rude mechanicals' *Pyramus and Thisbe* playlet, provide glimpses into the way in which Shakespeare envisioned his audiences' responses to prologues. To be sure, these moments of interpretation are inscribed by the playwright's pen and as such are mediated by any number of factors; to paraphrase Hamlet, the words of Shakespeare's characters must be suited to their actions, so these characters' interpretive acts will reflect their dramatic context. Nevertheless, these inset plays helpfully illustrate the playwright's expectations for his audience's conception of how the prologic space should function.

Recalling the means by which *Troilus*'s inside joke functions—by way of the required integration of information from outside of the fantastical playspace—we are able to see how a joke at a Prologue's expense relies upon a universal recognition of prologic convention. Similarly, the humor of Hamlet's indignation at the brevity of the player's prologue resonates in part because the Prince has voiced his expectations for a full account of the prologic dumb show that the players represent as a precursor to their play: Ophelia suggests that “this show imports the argument of the play” (3.2.126) and Hamlet affirms that “[w]e shall know by this fellow [i.e. the Prologue]. The players cannot keep counsel, they'll tell all” (3.2.127-28). Hamlet continues by intimating that the Prologue is predisposed to glossing “any show that you'll show him. Be not you ashamed to show, he'll not shame to tell you what it means” (3.2.130-31). Of course this latter assertion offers one of the many instances in which Hamlet directs a bawdy joke toward Ophelia; behind this bawdry, however, is Hamlet's expectation that the Prologue will explain the dumb show that they have just seen. As a point of comparison, in

another staged performance for a noble audience, Peter Quince re-enters to explicate the dumb show that follows his famously mispointed prologue to *Pyramus and Thisbe* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595, 1600). If prologic figures are assumed to explain these dumb shows in great detail, *Hamlet's* player denies this expectation, humbly submitting, instead: "For us and for our tragedy, / Here stooping to your clemency / We beg your hearing patiently" (3.2.133-35). As Ophelia notes, "'tis brief" (3.2.137), an observation that betrays her expectations. More pertinent to my point, though, this brief prologue is a comic rejoinder to Hamlet's expressed expectation of the Prologue's indiscrete and effusive explication. The prologue's brevity immediately provokes Hamlet's ire as he snaps at Ophelia, likening this brevity to "woman's love" (3.2.138); but before he takes offense, and in the context of the bawdy back-and-forth and Hamlet's near-giddiness with regards to the play, it seems likely that the Prologue, who is clearly skilled at extemporaneous performance, may be enacting a humorous defense in response to the pouty Prince's indictment of his (in)discretion: the courtly playspace at Elsinore likely would have been intimate enough for the Prologue to overhear Hamlet's characterization that he is an over-sharer.

Affirming the potential for humor, Ophelia's and Hamlet's expectations for prologic exposition may have been shared by the Globe audience. As noted, Bruster and Weimann have shown that early modern prologues averaged between fifteen and thirty-five lines in length. By this standard, *Gonzago's* prologue is remarkably less hefty, its three lines pointedly underplaying the noble's expectations, certainly, but very likely the audience's expectations as well. Such gross understatement is accentuated by the equally

vapid content of the prologue: Stephen Greenblatt notes that the dumb show was itself out of fashion on the early modern stage (3.2.11.n). Additionally, we might consider the use of the humility topos in this context—“stooping to your clemency / We beg your hearing patiently”—in the same vein as that of John Lyly: standard and clichéd. In this instance, meeting the audience’s expectations for the prologue by delivering a prologic ingredient that had been standard fare since the Middle Ages displays a pointed absence of innovation or rhetorical flair. In terms of both line-length and content, then, the prologue to *Gonzago* says nothing at all and may in fact have signaled a retrograde version of prologic spaces.

Helpfully affirming the apparent availability of the humility topos for comic effect, Peter Quince’s mispointed prologue to the inset play in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, performed in front of the newly-wed Duke of Athens and Queen of the Amazons, contains all of the right words to display conventional and appropriate humility:

[...]To show our simple skill
 (That* is the true beginning of our end)
 Consider then we come. But in despite
 We do not come. As minding to content you,
 Our true intent is all for your delight.
 We are not here that you should here repent you.* (5.1.110-15)⁴

⁴ 111| *i.e. “which”; 115|*i.e. repent yourself, reflexive penitence. In this instance I have used the Norton text, but emended the punctuation. The pointing in Greenblatt follows that of Q1 and F, all of which affirm the joke:

[...]To show our simple skill,
 That is the true beginning of our end.
 Consider then we come. But in despite.
 We do not come as minding to content you,
 Our true intent is. All for your delight
 We are not here. That you should here repent you
 The actors are at hand... (5.1.110-16)

As Theseus is quick to point out, the ostensibly bumbling guildsman “doth not stand upon points” (118)—that is, he does not stop for punctuation—and as a result transforms the expected flattery: “our true intent is all for your delight” becomes “Our true intent is all: for your delight / We are *not* here.” Lysander jokes that “he hath rid his prologue like a rough colt: he knows not the stop,” which he takes as “a good moral” lesson that “it is not enough to speak, but to speak true” (119-21). Similarly, Hippolyta observes the discord in his delivery in noting that “he hath played on his prologue like a child on a recorder” (122-3). The latter’s simile, however, also “plays on” the possibility that Quince’s mispointing is an intentional “play on” the conventional humility topos.

One may argue that the very profusion of commentary from the nobles suggests that the Globe audience would not have, in fact, noticed this subtle play on the humility topos. Perhaps, like Hamlet’s and Ophelia’s observations of *Gonzago*’s prologue’s brevity, the nobles protest too much. In both *Hamlet* and *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, however, the humor of the scenes functions on a different level for the performed audience than that of the actual Globe audience. This is to say that if the player’s pointedly brief prologue to *Gonzago* was a deliberate response to the Prince’s vocalized expectations for prologic convention, then we might read Quince’s prologue, in its denial of an expected performance of prologic humility, as a pointed—albeit comic—affront to the nobles’ elevated standing. Of course the nobles in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* interpret his mispointing as the work of a bumbling guildsman who knows neither “the stop” nor the skills required to play beyond the level of a child-like neophyte. However, reading through the lens of conventional humility, the expectation

of which would have been shared by the Globe audience, the mispointing, while comic, is tinged nonetheless by a sense of fool-like misrule. Such an inversion of decorum would not be out of place in the final act of a play that celebrates the fantastical breakdown of social conventions.

Returning to the *Gonzago* Prologue's denial of convention by way of Peter Quince's disruption of humility facilitates our recognition of a sometimes obstinate prologic prerogative that, in *Hamlet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, "plays upon" their dramatized audiences' presumption for the delight of their Globe audiences. While Theseus and Hyppolyta seem to miss the slight at their expense, Hamlet almost certainly perceives his: his barbed response to Ophelia's recognition of the prologue's brevity—he compares it to "woman's love" (3.2.137)—may plausibly be explained not as a direct reaction to Ophelia but to the Prologue's disruption of Hamlet's expectations. As further evidence that the Prince perceives the gibe, he appears, at this point, to redouble his efforts to control the narrative flow of his adapted *Gonzago*. Hamlet has already usurped the travelling players' play by inserting "a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines" (2.2.518) that resembles "something like the murder of my father" (2.2.572). If in fact Ophelia is correct and *Gonzago*'s dumb show "imports the argument of the play" (3.2.126), then it appears as though Hamlet had indeed inserted his narrative of his father's death: in the dumbshow a "poisoner" kills the sleeping king and successfully "woos the Queen with gifts" (3.2.122 s.d.). As the dumbshow plays out and elicits responses from the audience, however, Hamlet completely recontextualizes what the show "imports": that which he had described just a few scenes earlier as something like

the murder of Old Hamlet becomes something like Hamlet's murder of his uncle through the simple act of interpreting the "poisoner" as the "nephew to the king" (3.2.223).

Whether or not this controlling maneuver is instigated by the perception of a joke at Hamlet's expense (by the Prologue), the Prince, nonetheless, is controlling the narrative of the play simply by voicing his interpretation. If he did feel the slight, then he effectively reclaims the play from the insurgent Prologue.

The power of the subjective interpretive utterance is displayed as the *Murder of Gonzago* becomes *The Mousetrap*. Indeed, in *Hamlet* more than in many plays the interpretation of an audience takes on great importance; Hamlet's dramatic insertion is not only a means by which to take over the players' play, but "the thing/ Wherin ... [he will] catch the conscience of the King" (2.2.581-82). Hamlet's play will not, however, catch the King's conscience per se. Hamlet intimates, rather, in the vein of Wright's *Passions of the Mind*, that he will interpret Claudius's bodily response to the play, for he has

heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions;
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. (2.2.566-71)

In one sense Claudius's body becomes a text to be read for its hidden message. In the context of the *Gonzago/Mousetrap* metadrama—itsself set within Shakespeare's *Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*—the usurping King's actions become another play, a swelling scene which Hamlet must interpret. As such we can see the problem that subjective interpretation presents for the Prince. It is a problem that is exacerbated by

framing the dumbshow as a nephew's clandestine act of killing: under these circumstances, Claudius's reaction is no longer a reliable barometer of his "conscience" since they could easily signal a fear of his nephew's regicidal fantasies. If Hamlet thought that he was hedging his ability to interpret Claudius by positing that the murderer was the King's nephew, he only demonstrates the tenuous nature of the subjective, interpretive act.

It comes as no surprise that Shakespeare frames this overt struggle over interpretation in *Hamlet* as a struggle waged within the prologic space, for this is the site in which meaning is negotiated. On one hand, Hamlet's and Ophelia's reactions to the player's prologue, like the reactions of Theseus and Hippolyta to Peter Quince's, show us how audiences interpreted the prologues they heard on the early modern stage. On the other hand, Prince Hamlet transforms from interpreting auditor to invested author as he imposes an interpretation on the show, completely changing its tenor. Ophelia's assertion that Hamlet is "as good as a Chorus" (3.2.224) provides an additional key to understanding Shakespeare's prologic spaces, for Hamlet—as chorus—is not a passive observer relating information about the play. Although he certainly appears as such to Ophelia, the Globe audience knows that he is actively intervening in *Gonzago's* professed intent. The "Chorus" to *Gonzago*, then, wields a kind of prologic authority. This is to say that in *Hamlet's* staged interactions between an audience and a prologue—as in those staged in *Midsummer Night's Dream*—we can see not only the audience's role as engaged auditors but also that Shakespeare recognizes and "plays on" this intrinsic prologic authority.

Hamlet's metatheatrics also demonstrate an authorial possessiveness specific to the early modern dramatist. Indeed, the adapted *Gonzago* opens in a manner similar to the opening of *Hamlet*: in the framing play the Ghost of Old Hamlet presents a model, just as in the dumb show, through which the audience can interpret the ensuing play. Additionally, Hamlet's play is topical, mapping Claudius's alleged regicide and usurpation of the throne onto *Gonzago*; in doing so *Gonzago* mimics the topicality of much early modern drama. Perhaps more to the point, *Hamlet* (via Hamlet) enacts the struggle between a playwright, a player-Prologue, and an audience. While we cannot fully accept Hamlet's conclusion to "take the Ghost's word for a thousand pound" (3.2.263-4), the *Gonzago* passage nonetheless presents the Prince as an author figure twice attempting to frame the terms of his narrative. That there is some question regarding Claudius's response, for example, demonstrates the subjectivity inherent to the act of interpreting on-stage events.

Reading Romeo and Juliet

Inasmuch as the inset prologues in *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provide glimpses of audiences interpreting and reacting to prologic spaces and, in the Danish Prince, the author figure struggling to control his narrative, I must concede that these inset plays are always already themselves inscribed by the playwright. They are firmly situated in their fictional framework and although they might helpfully exemplify versions of prologic and authorial interactions, these versions are not without their prejudices. That said the textual history of *Romeo and Juliet* (1595, 1597) might offer hope of constructing a clearer picture of how the prologic spaces were actually

understood. Particularly, as new theories arise pertaining to the relationship between *Romeo*'s "bad" first quarto (Q1) and the "better" second quarto (Q2)—on which, in fact, all subsequent contemporary editions are based, as well as, in effect, most modern editions—we might begin to understand Q1 as offering some insight into how, at least on one occasion preserved by the printing house, someone remembered and recorded the prologic spaces of Shakespeare's play. Moreover, we might trace in the differences between the two some additional sense of how the early modern publisher conceived of the prologic space.

Beginning in the 1980s a new appreciation for the "bad" quartos arose, an appreciation stemming from these early exemplars very nature as alternate versions of what the new bibliography had come to accept as the "good" versions of Shakespeare's plays.⁵ Resulting from the publication of the Arden *Romeo*, some of the "new revisionists" began to laud the multiple-text dynamic of the so-called "bad" quartos as offering an alternate view of these versions than that provided by so many editors. Andrew Gurr has suggested that the reason for multiple versions of Shakespeare's plays has to do with performance practices: noting the inordinate lengths of plays compared to the documented insistence on their taking "two-hours' traffic," Gurr suggests that the

⁵ In 1909 A. W. Pollard created the classifications of "good" and "bad" that would dominate early twentieth-century Shakespeare criticism. The so-called bad quartos include those for *2 Henry VI* (1594), *3 Henry VI* (1595), *Richard II* (1597), *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), *Henry V* (1600), *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602), *Hamlet* (1603), and *Pericles* (1609). In his 1910 edition of *Merry Wives*, W. W. Greg advanced the theory that the "bad" versions were evidence of "memorial reconstruction" by actors. In recent years, as indicated, the notion of "bad" quartos has been supplanted by the tendency to view the plays as discrete versions of Shakespeare. Paul Werstine's "Narratives about Printed Shakespeare Texts" was one of the first to critique Pollard's "absurd" formulation (65).

longer versions of plays might represent “maximal” versions of a play.⁶ This expanded version of the play represents all of the possibilities for characterization and significant action as imagined by the playwright, from which the producers of the plays—actors, playwrights, theater proprietors, the landed gentry, the censor—carve a time- and audience-appropriate, “minimal” version of the play for a given performance. Lukas Erne pushes this idea in a different direction by suggesting that the longer, more complicated versions of plays—and *Romeo* specifically—represent literary versions of the plays, from which the performed versions—the other, less rich exemplars, such as Q1 *Romeo*—were culled for acting versions. Such criticism rethinks scholarly approaches to the playwright’s so-called bad quartos, which opposes the longstanding view that pirates published surreptitious versions of the more acceptable, “more Shakespearean” versions of the plays.

Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor report that Q1 derives from a condensed acting version of the play, while Q2, the “Newly corrected, augmented, and amended” version (as per its title page) takes its provenance from a draft closer to the original copy (288).⁷ Indeed, even the plays’ prologues bear out the suggestion that the source text was cut down to a length manageable in performance. The end of the Q1 prologue, for example, condenses the latter half of the sonnet-prologue, represented by the uncondensed Q2, without losing any pertinent information:

Whose misadventured, piteous overthrows
Doth with their death, bury their parents’ strife.

⁶ Gurr, “Maximal and Minimal Texts.”

⁷ Stephen Orgel (231-56) fruitfully complicates this notion of an “original” at all, suggesting instead that various versions of plays are just that: versions. They are the result of the collaborative play writing process characteristic of the early modern theater.

The fearful passage of their death-marked love,
 And the continuance of their parents' rage—
 Which, but their children's end naught could remove—
 Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage.
 The which, if you with patient ears attend,
 What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend. (Q2, 1.0.7-14)

becomes

Whose misadventures, piteous overthrows
 (Through the continuing of their fathers' strife
 And death-marked passage of their parents' rage),
 Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
 The which, if you with patient ears attend,
 What here we want we'll study to amend. (Q1, 1.0.7-12)⁸

While some of the lines have an “un-Shakespearean” ring, in both cases the information essential to the argument of the play remains: the lovers die, the families are angry, and this will comprise the two-hour traffic of the stage. Again, the retention of the plays' pertinent information suggests that such condensing either represents intentional, performance-necessitated abridgements along the lines of Gurr's minimal text model, or that faulty reporting by actors reassembling the play from memory, a possibility also noted by Wells and Taylor (288). As an example of the latter instance, differences such as that between “misadventured” and “misadventures,” or the couplet-ing of quatrains (Q1 ll.9-10 and Q2 ll.9-12) seem naturally explained as aural or memorial confusions.⁹ However, both versions of the prologue demonstrate an investment in versification, genre, and form; the dialogic sonnet exchange between the masked lovers that

⁸ Cited from Halio's parallel text version.

⁹ I do not intend to advocate the memorial reconstruction theory per se. Whether or not Q1 was reconstituted by actors or by some other entity is not as important to my reading. If we at least agree that Q1 represents a condensed version of the copy behind the longer Q2, then we can see how the “condenser” (below, the “reporter”) viewed the relevance of the prologue vis-à-vis the act of condensing. I am interrogating (this is to say) why, in the spirit of shortening the play, the prologue is retained.

culminates in their first kiss (1.5.90-104) is present in both, for example, thus illustrating the attention to intricately designed poetic interplay and to the sonnet as an appropriate form for the expression of love poetry. The differences in the quartos' prologues suggests that the copy behind Q1 could not be a Shakespearean revision since the playwright clearly had a formal and poetic vision for his play and is not likely to have shifted away from the tight sonnet form represented by Q2 into the much less-designed verse of Q1.

In addition to suggesting that Q1 is a minimal version, perhaps for acting, the differences between the Q1 and Q2 prologues may also tell us something about the ways in which the recorders of the copy behind Q1 interpreted the play's prologue in and for performance. For all of its inauspicious reconstructions, the Q1 prologue nevertheless retains the final three lines of the Q2 version almost verbatim. Given the fact that the lines are the last spoken before the play proper begins, they would have been a cue to Samson and Gregory who wait in the wings. As such, a reporter—possibly an actor, and possibly one playing one of the Capulet boys—might have more easily recalled them for reconstruction. As an additional mnemonic aid, the prologue conventionally (for the sonnet form) ends with a couplet. More to the point, however, these lines rehearse several prologic conventions, and if these conventions were internalized by the reporter, then they may also have facilitated recall. In these lines we hear the extra-dramatic indication of the two-hour time frame, as well as a request for “patient ears” and the humble promise to “amend” the play's faults. Here we see the earlier prologue's formulaic constructions retained; Q1 therefore suggests that such conventions may have

been rote for the recorder, whether he or she was an actor or merely a scribe or saw the foreshortened performance.

In addition to these telling formulaic elements, however, the attention that the condensed Q1 pays to the prologue's thematic elements may indicate how at least one auditor—the reporter—interpreted the prologue's content. As is typical of many early modern prologues, the *Romeo and Juliet* prologues both summarize the plot. In the version represented by Q2, the Montagues and Capulets are part of a long-standing Veronese feud: they are “Two households, both alike in dignity” who bear an “ancient grudge,” of which the latest civil unrest is merely part and parcel, a “new mutiny.” In this version, “civil blood makes civil hands unclean,” a playful exposition on “civil” that points up the fact that citizens are killing other citizens, thus locating the tragedy of the families' fighting in large part in their inability to see their social similarities. It would appear as though the reporters of Q1 latched onto the Q2 version's play on “civil”: the “two household friends alike in dignity [...] From civil broils broke into enmity / Whose civil war makes civil hands unclean” (Q1, 1.0.3). “Civil” as an aural marker, clearly reverberated in the reporters' memories since they added another to their version. More than this addition, though, the Q1 version slightly shifts our understanding of the families' relationship, as in Q2 the families are peers “alike in dignity,” but the notion that they were also once “friends” suggests that the Montagues and Capulets, contrary to Q2, were not always bitterly embroiled. This notion is compounded in the contrast between “civil broils” and “enmity,” the former perhaps suggesting “civilized disagreements” which, abruptly and significantly, “*broke into* enmity.” This subtle shift

suggests that in Q1 the tragedy of the families' history lay not solely in the fact of the families' social similarities, but rather in this sense of a fall from an ideal state of friendship. Such a fall, I want to suggest, punctuates the prologue's tone of impending tragedy in a more overt manner than the Q2 prologue. The Q2 version, for example, implies an ultimate resolution when the two families, as a result of the "star-crossed lovers'" deaths, will "bury" their "strife": "but their children's end [we are told] naught could remove" their rivalry. Q1, on the other hand, pointedly denies reconciliation and "the continuing of their fathers' strife / And death-marked passage of their parents' rage" in fact facilitates the play's ultimate tragedy, the lovers' "misadventures, piteous overthrows." Taken together, Q1's irreconcilable enmity and the families' fall from an ideal of friendship demonstrate a rhetorical redoubling of the already tragic version. If we can read the Q1 version as an artifact of an auditor's interpretation, then these subtle differences speak to the reporter's ability and desire to record the formal and thematic nuances represented by the prologue.

Taking a wider view of Q1 as a version of performance, this attention to tonal and formal aspects of the prologue buttresses the sense that *Romeo and Juliet's* prologue was worth preserving. Far from being expendable or, as Tiffany Stern has suggested, a commercially-motivated rhetorical mode reserved for benefit performances, the fact that an already-condensed acting version retains the prologue seems to suggest its importance to the integrity of the production.¹⁰ Of course one might suggest that the tonal inconsonance between the prologue and first act signals its expendability. Indeed while

¹⁰ Stern, "'On each Wall and Corner Poast'."

the prologue promises tragedy, the play begins with comic undertones: there are various discourses on marriage (Lady Capulet and Juliet, Romeo and the Friar); Romeo's lovesickness; a masked ball; even the opening street brawl is colored by comic banter. I would argue, though, that the tonal shift between the prologue and the first half of the play proper is indicative of—and integral to—a larger scheme of generic intermingling in the play. Almost precisely halfway through the play proper, the tone abruptly shifts to the prologue's promised tragedy.¹¹ In the space between acts two and three an unannounced revolution of Fortune's wheel invites a contrast between Romeo's love-sicknesses (sparked first by Rosaline and then Juliet), the young lovers' hasty courtship, and their post-hasty marriage—all in scene 9 or 2.5, Q1 and Q2 respectively—and Mercutio's death, Tybalt's Death, Romeo's realization that he is Fortune's fool, and his banishment—all of which are in scene 10 (3.1). The play's generic affinities turn and counterturn at several points, and the prologue is a pointed beginning to this cycle.

The effect that such generic back-and-forth may have had on the audience is measureable if we read through the lens of our understanding of the audiences' engagements with prologues and plays in *Hamlet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. As we have seen, Ophelia, Hamlet, Hippolyta, and Theseus all demonstrate audiences' interactions with plays. Again, these are all fictional constructs inscribed by the

¹¹ I consider this the "halfway" point because, with regard to lineation, both plays can be bisected at or around the shift from Act 2 to Act 3. Of course there were no scene or act divisions in the printed versions of these plays, and they were only signaled linguistically during the performances. In terms of lineation, however, the scene in which Romeo and Juliet are married marks the height of the comedy, and the subsequent scene, in which Romeo declares that he is Fortune's slave (Q1) or fool (Q2), contains Mercutio's and Tybalt's deaths and Romeo's banishment. In Q2 this transitional scene is sandwiched between 1362 lines in the first half, and 1414 lines in the second. In Q1, the 10th scene falls between the 867 line first half and the 998 line second half. Even more remarkable—if only coincidental—the prince banishes Romeo at almost the exact midpoint of Q1, at line 137 of the scene and, thus, line 1004 into a play of 2010 total lines.

playwright; as such, however, they demonstrate at the very least a kind of ideal audience, if only insofar as interaction is concerned. These characters' engagements with the inset plays demonstrate an attention to the play's details, both formal and poetic. As I have argued, Hamlet and Ophelia are attuned to the prologic conventions and Theseus and Hippolyta easily note the mispointing of Peter Quince's sentences. I want to suggest that these auditors' attention to these details is precisely the kind of audience that Shakespeare envisioned for the generic oscillations in *Romeo and Juliet*. The promise of tragedy in the prologue is met instead with comedy; the tragic elements are delayed for half of the play. This design implies an audience attuned to generic nuances as Hamlet and Hippolyta are attuned to formal and poetic. The effect of such engagement with the play is a heightened sense of dramatic tension and, ultimately, a greater appreciation for the play's tragic elements.

Again indulging our own imaginary forces, let us envision the audience's engagement with the play on an afternoon in the autumn of 1596. They would have come to the playhouse expecting the "excellent tragedie" that had been advertised on every post and door in the liberties.¹² These expectations are confirmed (for our auditors) by the Prologue's promise that two lovers' "death-marked" (or "-marred") love will be the subject of the performance. But the play does not deliver on this promise for two acts. I do not mean to suggest that the early modern playgoer was sitting in anticipation of the play's promised tragedy; what is pertinent, though, is that the prologue frames the

¹² Tiffany Stern, noting similarities in appearance and content between the handful of extant playbills and plays' title pages, suggests that the information contained in the latter may have mimicked that of the former.

play as tragedy, and does so from a position of authority. The disjunction, then, between what is promised and what is delivered amounts to a rhetorical misdirection. Of course the play is an “excellent tragedie,” but we see in the *Romeo and Juliet* prologue—or rather in the implication of the prologue in the play’s agenda of generic intertwining—the importance that the form plays for Shakespeare on the rare occasion that he uses it.

In terms of prologues’ indispensability, a note about the apparently dispensable Chorus after Act One is in order. As has been noted, Q1 does not include this second Chorus at all, and while its absence could be attributed to any of a host of reasons—misunderstanding, printing expedience, the Chorus’s absence in a given performance—its absence really only accentuates the degree to which the second intervening chorus is not necessary to the spirit of tragedy in the play. As the Q2 example of the chorus demonstrates, the prologic voice here has completely abandoned the tragic undertones of the initial prologue and bought into the play’s comic shift. The second chorus provides a rather trite rehearsal of the events of the first act: the lovesick Romeo pines for Rosaline, meets Juliet, and then forgets the former and complains for the latter. In this way it exemplifies the wholesale investment in the first two acts’ comic/romantic love story; if someone were cutting for performance, say, then this Chorus may appear superfluous. Its absence testifies to more than just its superfluity for Q1’s purposes, as it also affirms Q2’s dedication to shifting genres: if the Chorus is deemed unnecessary by the Q1 reporter, then it is being interpreted as an instance of overkill in the copy behind Q2. This instance accentuates Q2’s dependence upon the prologic space to steer the audience’s reading. If the audience is trained, like Hamlet, to trust that the prologic

figure will tell all, then having him twice misled the audience before disappearing altogether seems to be a designed manipulation of this expectation. This is to say that Q2 demonstrates an understanding of the prologic space that—not unlike the carefully designed sonnet itself—is absent from Q1; it represents a deployment of the form that is based on an assumption of the audience’s interpretive intervention that is consonant with the imagined audiences of Shakespeare’s inset prologues.

For Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, an intrinsic prologic authority gives the playwright, on the one hand, a way to introduce his play in a conventional manner while, on the other, a way to use the prologue as a foil and ground in his generic manipulation. Shakespeare and his audience had internalized the prologic inherent authority, and so, it seems, have we modern critics. In his edition of the play Lukas Erne suggests that the Chorus (and Prologue) could have doubled with the Prince of Verona; the suggestion passes without note or additional comment, as though it were a matter of course (160). Indeed, the Prologue could logistically double with any character that does not appear onstage immediately after—or, in the case of Q2’s second-act Chorus, before—the prologic character’s scene, limited only by the logistics of fluidity between scenes.¹³ I do not claim any definitive knowledge on the matter—indeed, it is impossible with the extant evidence to know whether or not the Prologue doubled the Prince of Verona—I only mean to point out that Erne’s suggestion speaks to an internalized understanding of prologic authority. This is to say that, if we read Erne reading the play, his nonchalance in suggesting that the actor playing the Prologue also played the

¹³ In Q2, e.g., this rules out Juliet, her Nurse, Romeo, Benvolio, Mercutio, and the Capulet boys.

Prince—the latter of whom chastises the rival households, banishes Romeo, and otherwise attempts to keep the peace—then I find in Erne a kindred spirit. It is the kind of often unassuming prologic authority that we may internalize and let pass without comment, but it is this authority that Shakespeare exploits. By examining his idiosyncratic methods we can learn more about his self-conception, his understanding of his audience, and of theatrical authority. It is to this examination that I turn in the final section of this chapter.

Although all of Shakespeare's prologic exempla differ in substantial ways—from *Romeo and Juliet's* sonnet to *Troilus and Cressida's* narrating, average-length prologue, and from *2 Henry IV's* experiments with Rumour to *Henry V's* ostensibly epic Chorus—they all share an interest in testing the boundaries and conventions of the form and, importantly, in testing their audience's understanding of those boundaries. Indeed, their very variety speaks to Shakespeare's experimental impulse as he explores the utility of these authorial spaces. As we have seen in the inset prologues in *Hamlet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Prologue is keen to challenge the audience's expectations; similarly, the Chorus to *Romeo and Juliet* leads the auditor through a generic hodge-podge that exacerbates the high tragedy of the star-crossed lovers' plight. In what follows I will follow this experimental impulse into Shakespeare's more sustained engagements with the prologic form. In these exemplars we shall see the prologue's intrinsic authority pointedly engaging the audience's "imaginary forces."

Prologic Agitation

Taking our cues from these plays, as well as from *Troilus and Cressida*'s insistently authorial agenda, we can begin to see Shakespeare's level of investment in the prologic space. His discerning use of the form speaks to a level of deliberation that merits a closer look than we have given to Shakespeare's prologic spaces. In what follows I would like to apply the lessons of the prologic spaces discussed above to a consideration of the figure of Rumour in his *2 Henry IV* (1597, 1600) and to perhaps his most-discussed prologic endeavor, the Chorus in *Henry V* (1599, 1600). Of course the prologic spaces of these plays demonstrate an authorial possessiveness that predisposes them to audience manipulation; however, because Shakespeare encourages and depends upon the audience's active interpretation of the play they are seeing, his means of manipulation are interactive and, to borrow from Robert Weimann, bi-fold. What becomes clear through a study of *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* is that Shakespeare's prologic spaces are much less about ushering the audience over a threshold and providing them passage from the world of London into the fantasy world of the play than they are about a kind of prologic agitation: they exemplify an interplay between author and audience that occurs both within and above the theoretical playspace and that challenges the audience's expectations. Through these metadramatic challenges, however, this interplay also encourages the theater-going individual to rethink the ways in which he or she receives narratives. This is to say that Shakespeare seems to encourage the measured and contemplative individualism increasingly required of the audience by way of his challenging, potentially off-putting prologic agitation.

Perhaps the most overt representation of this prologic agitation is Shakespeare's Rumour. Striding onto the stage with a cape painted full with tongues, the prologue to 2 *Henry IV* at once alludes to and manipulates convention. As we have seen, the typical early modern stage Prologue was dressed in a black cloak, and 2 *Henry IV*'s Prologue's cape would certainly have registered as homage to this common visual marker of the early modern Prologue.¹⁴ Even before Rumour speaks his first line, then, he presents an alternative to the typical register with which the audience might categorize the prologic figure. His first appearance is visually arresting, and his agitation is only compounded by his first lines: "Open your ears; for which of will stop / the vent of hearing when loud rumour speaks?" (1.0.1-2).¹⁵ He opens with an imperative, and the subsequent rhetorical question seems to imply that the Globe's auditors are in no position to shield their ears from Rumour. Continuing to play upon this physical presence, Rumour uses a specific reference to his wardrobe to establish, in the first twenty lines of his prologue, a poetic self-characterization: "Upon my tongues continual slanders ride, / The which in every language I pronounce, / Stuffing the ears of men with false reports" (1.0.6-8). Not only does Rumour make clear that he traffics in "continual slanders" and "covert enmity

¹⁴ On the cloak as typical attire, see Bruster and Weimann 24, and Stern, "A small-beer" 180-81. For contemporary references, see Beaumont's *Woman Hater* (1605), "inductions are out of date, and a Prologue in Verse is as stale as a black Velvet Cloake, and a bay Garland" (1.0.1-2); and Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, the induction to which features three boy actors vying for the cloak and attendant right to present the prologue.

¹⁵ Greenblatt notes that Rumour is "based on Virgil's 'Fama'" (1.0.sd.n.). A more immediate reference might be the emblem tradition. For example Otto Van Veen's *Amorum Emblemata*, an emblem book that was published in a Latin-English-Italian polyglot version, contains an emblem entitled "Love Often Deaf" that depicts Fame blowing a horn at Love, who has stopped his ears with his fingers. The motto makes clear that "hee not endures to heare/ But makes himself bee deaf by stopping either eare, / To shew he will not give ill opinion place." Van Veen's edition is late (1608) and originates on the Continent, so direct influence is not possible, but the emblem tradition was prone to use stock images so such an image—with such striking parallels—may have circulated in England.

(1.0.9), but he also constructs himself as an author of actions, eliciting “fearful musters” in panicked soldiers (1.0.11) and “still [i.e. perpetually] unfold[ing] / The acts commencèd on this ball of earth” (1.0.4-5). This latter reference tellingly and importantly works in two directions, at once alluding to Rumour as a driving force of nature behind the earthly actions of postlapsarian humans while also referring to himself as a theatrical, prologic agent who, as prologue, “unfold[s] / the acts” of the play “on”—or, perhaps, “in”—Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre (“this ball of earth”).

Rumour, then, is not merely visually and aurally arresting, but in his ostensible usurpation of the authorial prologic space he also redefines the level of veracity that might be associated with the space. If, as Hamlet announces, audiences were to “know by this fellow” what the play was about, then the confrontational figure of Rumour challenges this luxury of knowledge: were the audience to believe Rumour, they would be made into fools; but to reject him is to reject the expected guidance of the conventional prologic figure and to tread unfamiliar territory. This sense of prologic agitation is compounded by the prologic space’s forced associations with the vice character. Rumour’s twenty-line self-portrait concludes with an indictment implicit in the rhetorical question “But what need I thus / My well-known body to anatomize / Among my household?” (1.0.20-21), clearly implicating the audience as one of the rumor-mongering fold. This association is moral in its implications, condemning the audience as inherently evil cohorts. One sees, then, in the first half of this forty-line prologue the introduction of an authorial figure—whom the audience, under conventional circumstances, would trust—who not only constructs himself as a

pernicious Prologue but also constructs the audience as “the blunt monster, with uncounted heads, / The still-discordant wav’ring multitude” (1.0.18-19) that perpetuates rumor. This is to say that, for an audience that is predisposed to identifying with the authorial, prologic figure, *2 Henry IV*’s Rumour turns that trust into an anxiety-producing proposition by implicating the audience in his agenda. Such implication has potentially seditious consequences: Rumour announces that his “office is / To noise abroad that Harry Monmouth fell / Under the wrath of noble Hotspur’s sword” (1.0.28-29); to “bring smooth comforts false, worse than true wrongs” (1.0.40). Thus the audience’s indictment-by-association implies their complicity in this spreading of falsehoods about the would-be regent-hero, Henry V, that are “worse than true [i.e. honorable] wrongs.”

Situated as though they are in league with Rumour, the onus falls on the audience to controvert this negative association and to shed the epithet of “still-discordant wav’ring multitude” by forging an alternate, factual path away from that which Rumour proscribes: that is, it becomes the audience’s job to read through the rumors. Indeed, as the play proper begins, the audience is privy to the very kind of sorting through narratives that, by implication of the prologue, is necessary to subdue the spread of rumors. Lord Bardolph delivers news—“As good as heart can wish” (1.1.13)—that King Henry is wounded, Hal is slain, and Falstaff is taken prisoner. Northumberland, however, requires ocular proof of his own, asking “Saw you the field? Came you from Shrewsbury?” (1.1.24). Insofar as he himself has steered clear of the Battle of Shrewsbury to the demise of Hotspur, his son, and switched allegiances according to

who garners him the most political gain, it seems clear that Northumberland is not to be taken as any sort of model citizen; but he is, in this moment, modeling the kind of critical, questioning poise that I think the prologue to the play espouses. When pressed, Lord Bardolph reveals that he got his information—or misinformation, as it turns out—from “a gentleman well bred and of good name” (1.1.26-27), and we might imagine a staging in which Rumour, as he exits, having just vowed to spread this very bit of news, engages Lord Bardolph as he enters, passing on this “smooth comfort false.”¹⁶ Such a staging might capitalize upon the audience’s distaste for Rumour and accentuate Lord Bardolph’s comic inability to judge character. Regardless of this speculative staging, though, the audience sees Northumberland sifting through narratives in order to arrive at some conclusive version of the truth: his servant Travers offers another bit of second-hand information that, like Lord Bardolph’s, is superseded by Morton’s first-hand account of the events at Shrewsbury. What is on display here is a model of how to engage rumor by weighing multiple points of view against one another, evaluating their worth, and ultimately overcoming (in this scene) the forces of Rumour.¹⁷ While it may be too much to say that *2 Henry IV* takes this view of sifting through narratives as its central theme, it is certainly significant that, in the early moments of a play that invites the audience to legitimate the ascending Hal/Henry V, we have an implied call to arms

¹⁶ Melchiori suggests that Rumour could himself double Bardolph, on the assumption that it would be easy to remove the prologic cloak and re-enter with little time lost (16-17). This is certainly possible, but it seems even more efficient to have Rumour pass this information to him. In Melchiori’s staging, Bardolph is understood to be spreading the rumor alluded to in the prologue; in mine, Rumour spreads the rumor to Bardolph, and its further dissemination compounds the viral nature of Rumour, and rumor.

¹⁷ Melchiori notes that “[q]uestions surrounding the constructedness of history have focused particularly on the figure of Rumour, and the potentials it invokes. Historians and literary critics alike have examined how rumour related to or was informed by contemporary concerns about unregulated speech” (61).

against the ways in which Rumour—and, by implication, rumor—dictates our narratives.¹⁸

It is altogether appropriate, then, that the subsequent and final play in the so-called Tudor Tetralogy, *Henry V*, may also be read as an imperative to sift through narratives. In the same fashion as *2 Henry IV*—and indeed following the same model that we have seen in the inset prologues of *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*, and which we have observed in *Romeo and Juliet*—the prologic spaces of *Henry V* may be seen to toy with the expected conventions of the form and, in doing so, encourage a critical engagement with the sentiments expressed in the play. The final movement of this chapter explores these claims by mapping some of the characteristics of the Shakespearean prologic space onto the last installment in the narrative of one of England's most celebrated monarchies. As shall become clear, *Henry V* offers a unique deployment of a prologic figure in its Chorus that ultimately invites a critique of the manner in which narrative is constructed and received.

¹⁸ We are reminded of this kind of reading a number of times in the play in addition to Northumberland's questioning of Lord Bardolph: in 3.1, King Henry recounts Northumberland's tendency for shifting loyalties and notes the accounts that have his and the Archbishop's armies numbering fifty thousand troops, but Warwick reasons that this cannot be true, as rumor redoubles the fears of men; later, in 4.1, we see Prince John debunk the Archbishop's misreading of King Henry's state of mind as too weary to sift through loyalties; and, in the coup de grâce, Hal's rejection of Falstaff may be interpreted as a response to misreadings of his persona. In this latter instance one sees the celebration of the new monarch, and perhaps a hint at his Machiavellianism, as he seeks to manipulate rumor: that is to say that, if we take "rumor" in light of Rumour's definition—the spreading of smooth lies false—then we see that, in manipulating his persona, Hal/Henry V is manipulating the narrativizing tendency to his own ends. He is constructing his own narrative, one that makes him a king, and supplanting the old narrative—what others thought of him. In a play that seems invested in the idea of challenging narratives, it seems appropriate that Rumour would burst onto the scene and bombastically force the audience to think critically about the things that they hear in the play. His prologic agitation, that is, produces a readerly imperative to interpret between the lines, if, that is, they don't want to be associated with the house of rumor.

Such a reading of *Henry V*, however, rests upon a still-contentious understanding that the Chorus is an ambiguous figure that is Shakespeare's only sustained use of a chorus in a play.¹⁹ Many maintain that the Chorus offers a distinctly unambiguous celebration of a national hero, while others consider the Chorus a dangerously tongue-in-cheek critique of Henry.²⁰ Certainly, coming on the heels of the victory at Cadiz and the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and coming in the midst of the excitement over Essex's presumed victory in Ireland—to which the play ostensibly alludes (5.0.29-34)²¹—the time may very well have warranted a particularly patriotic expression of English pride, on which a superficial reading of the Chorus delivers in spades. However this period in English history is not without its taints: students of *Henry V* need little more in the way of a reminder than the fact that Essex famously failed in Ireland, disgracing the crown and falling into almost immediate disfavor. Moreover, at the turn of the century the endemic cultural anxieties of the period—over immigration, plague, the heirless and aging Queen, surreptitious Catholicism and oppressive Puritanism—are compounded by millennialist fears. Moreover, neither Henry V nor his descendent Elizabeth was—

¹⁹ In the Folio version of *Henry V* the Chorus appears as prologue and then introduces each of the subsequent scenes, whereas in Q1 there are no choruses. The Chorus appears briefly in *Romeo and Juliet*, and in *Winter's Tale* "Time" is a Chorus that transitions between different temporal settings.

²⁰ Gerald Gould proposed in 1919 that "*The play is ironic*" (42, emphasis in original). Greenblatt, in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, argues that a subversive portrayal of Henry is not possible because the same brand of "privileged visibility" that legitimates Elizabethan power structure is also prevalent in the theater; thus, the *Henry V* Chorus's accentuation of the audience's imaginative powers is, like theater itself, "a primary expression of Renaissance power" that "helps to contain the radical doubts it continually provokes" (63-65).

²¹ The reference to a "General [...] / ... from Ireland coming, / Bringing rebellion broachéd on his sword" is widely considered to be a reference to the eventual triumphant return of Essex from Ireland. Essex, of course, quelled no rebellion in Ireland, so this line has been taken as the reason for the Chorus's presumed excision by the censors. An alternative—Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy—is offered by Dutton.

contrary to their mythical, cultural constructions—truly benevolent rulers.²² While one might argue that, in any early modern context, it would have been suicidal for a playwright to openly challenge a national narrative and, by implication, the regent, one might also argue that in fact the theater is the only early modern space in which such a critique could take place. Historicizing the play, then, does not make the case of the Chorus any less opaque.

What is clear, however, is that whatever the, if you will, “intention” of the choruses, we see in *Henry V* the development of a Prologue whose assertions are challenged by the action of the play, thus resulting in a betrayal of the trust that the audience holds for the authorial, prologic figure. It may be overstating the case to assert, as Anthony Hammond does, that the Chorus to *Henry V* “contrives to get, really, everything wrong” (138); while the audience following the Chorus is undeniably led astray, it is not so much a matter of wrong or right as it is the shading of events in favorable hues. As Andrew Gurr has it, “the chorus is a great painter of pictures, but they are never the pictures shown on stage” (9)²³. While the Chorus “whips up enthusiasm” (Gurr 7) for the “Star of England,” the action of the play itself confounds Henry’s heroism with, for example, the duplicitous killing of his prisoners, the threats to rape and pillage the besieged Harfleur, and the encamped soldiers’ failure to unquestionably

²² Curtis Bright, for example, reevaluates the “so-called ‘new-historicism’” that underwrites an “Elizabethan mythography,” arguing that the underlying political atmosphere was that of living in a “state of terror” (3-5) in which “the state extensively monitored domestic populations from the highest to the lowest levels of society” (52). Henry’s atrocities, in the fiction of the play only, include his threats to rape and pillage Harfleur, his possibly retaliatory killing of French prisoners, and the hanging of his one-time compatriot Bardolph as an example to would-be pillagers.

²³ Gurr (6-15) offers an extensive account and reading of the inconsistencies between Chorus and the play’s action.

justify the war on the eve of Agincourt. While the *Henry V* Chorus is certainly not as flamboyantly provocative as *2 Henry IV*'s Rumour, it nonetheless provides another example in which the audience cannot in fact rely upon the guidance of the prologic figure.

Borrowing Gurr's question: why were the choruses written at all? Their notable absence from all quarto versions of the play attests to their expendability. Furthermore, as necessarily extraneous to the play proper, a "minimal" performance version of the play—ostensibly what the first quarto (Q1) represents—may quite reasonably cut these Choruses in the name of expedience. Gurr helpfully argues, though, that the Chorus's blatant nationalism balances the play proper's picture of Henry as a rapacious consumer of conquests, from Harfleur to Agincourt, and France writ large to Katharine in micro. If Shakespeare offers in the body of *Henry V* a critique of his more warlike tendencies, as Gurr posits, then the Chorus is required to offset this critique with enthusiastic praise.

Given the Chorus's charge of patronizing Henry, then—to ask the obverse question—why would the choruses have been excluded from the quarto versions of the play? Questions of expedience aside, one must certainly consider the hopeful anticipation of Essex's return from Ireland before the fifth act. Of course Essex did not triumphantly return and was, in short order, disgraced, dispatched to the Tower, and executed; thus a reference to Essex would necessitate a degree of revision. Complete excision, however, of 180 lines and five acts of prologic space seems excessive when a few revisions would have done the trick. The cutting may suggest that the patina of heroism provided by the prologic character's rose-tinted lenses was not sufficient to

balance the critical view of Henry in the play proper. Indeed the cumulative revisions in the play's first quarto and the folio texts speak to a desire to mitigate this critique: the corrupt bishops are cut from the opening, as are references to Henry's cold dismissal of the popular Falstaff leading to the comic hero's death. Gurr summarizes that "[t]he underlying emphasis of the changes is of course to intensify Henry's heroism, and to play down the setbacks to his campaign" (*First* 22). Of course it could be the confluence of events that necessitated their exclusion in Q1—the need for a shorter version combined with the need to remove some offensive material meant that it was simpler to cut the prologic spaces; but this revisionist's project seems to indicate that something more troubling than a reference to Essex would have prompted the wholesale removal of the choruses.

I would like to suggest that there is a satirical flair in the Chorus's interjections—a hint of irony that would not have been lost on the attuned early modern play-goer. If we consider the reference to Essex, for example, it may be the case that this is not simply a topical reference predicting Essex's return, but rather an ironic reference to Essex's failure in Ireland and, in fact, to his fall from favor and subsequent execution. This is to suggest, of course, that the Chorus of *Henry V* was much more dangerous than a mere mistaken calculation of Essex's capability would suggest. Rather, reading the Chorus's unbridled affinity for Henry as satire makes it an integral part of—and not a balance to—a critique of Henry's doggedly rapacious taste for conquest, thus making it much easier to explain why the quarto versions of the play do not include any of the prologic spaces.

The Chorus's enthusiasm left the chance for plausible deniability, but did not ultimately dull the satirical edge.

Moreover, a satirical reading is all the more dangerous when it is launched from the prologic space; therein it is framed as an authorial position and, as befits Shakespeare's uses of the form, encourages audience participation in the critique. Indeed in the opening to *Henry V* the Chorus is quite explicit on this point as it insists that it is the audience's "thoughts that now must deck our kings" (1.0.28). The prologic space becomes a site in which the auditors will begin to construct anew the narrative that they have received about the heroic Henry. They will not only imaginatively dress the King—"deck" him, that is, in appropriate garb that "this unworthy scaffold" claims not to provide—but the Chorus goes on to suggest that the audience must also judge the King: they must decorate him, as it were, with the accoutrements of his desert. The Chorus asks permission to "Prologue-like your humble patience pray / Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play" (1.0.33-4). The first six words of the latter line have the appearance of a conventional lend-me-your-hands trope, but structurally they're more ambiguous. While printed punctuation cannot be trusted, the structural and rhythmic pairing of "gently to hear" and "kindly to judge" leaves the remaining syllables of the pentameter line—"our play"—dangling at the end, rhythmically ostracized from the parallel structure of the first eight beats of the line. To be sure, this rhythmic separation of "our play"—coupled with the fact that it has pride-of-place as the last words of the prologue—may be taken to accentuate rather than detract from the play itself, as such; the play is, after all, the thing that folks have paid to hear. Again, though, the pairing of "gently to hear" and "kindly to

judge” creates a moment’s pause in which an astute auditor might reconsider what precisely they are to hear and judge. It could mean—in addition to “our play”—either “me Chorus to this history” or, I would suggest, “our kings.” The prologue places the onus of interpretation on the audience, acknowledging the fact that the play itself—as such—is given to them.

In *Henry V*’s prologic imperative to interpretation we see a radical embrace with the audience that is altogether in keeping with Shakespeare’s expectations of audience interaction and participation. If we see the reactions of Hamlet, Ophelia, Hippolyta, and Theseus as ways in which Shakespeare might have imagined his audiences, then we can see the remarkable extent to which the play, not only “authorizes spectatorship as a privileged instance of signification in the theater” (Bruster and Weimann 142), but, taking this privileged position as a given, challenges the auditors to rethink the nature of received narratives.

To this end, Shakespeare pointedly deploys the consistently interjecting chorus—his only sustained use of the form in his entire oeuvre—as a means of prologic agitation: instead of allowing the auditors to settle-in to the fantasy of the play world, the Chorus constantly interrupts the narrative. The chorus to the second act, for example, asserts that

The king is set from London, and the scene
Is now transported, gentles, to Southampton.
There is the playhouse now, there must you sit,
[...]
But till the King come forth, and not till then,
Unto Southampton do we shift our scene. (2.0.34-36, 41-42)

Moving from France, to London’s Eastcheap with Henry’s miscreant former mates, and finally, once “the King come[s] forth,” to Southampton, the Chorus tests the bounds of

imaginative plausibility. The end result is to remind the auditors that they “sit” in “the playhouse now.” Such reminders are evident before act three, where the audience must “play with your fancies;” “do but think;” “grapple your mines;” “work, work your thoughts;” and “eke out our performance with your mind.” As we see in these passages the Chorus constantly calls attention to the realities of the playhouse. Of course the theater is perforce an imaginative space, but the net result of overstating the case in this is to remind the audience of the material realities of dramatic production.

Such hyperbole, as a rhetorical trope, figures into the ironic reading of *Henry V*'s prologic spaces; such hyperbole may remind one of John Lyly's gratuitous overstatements of humility as he worked to construct an authorial persona. More than this, though, these prologic spaces force the auditor to think critically about the way that this Chorus—typically an authorial figure whom the audience could follow—frames Henry's narrative. Instead of simply following the prologic figure into the play and hearing a narrative of national heroism, the audience's tuned ear, like Theseus's and Hippolyta's, would discern the nuances of misrepresentation and, as a result, re-evaluate the jingoistic bent of the authorial, prologic framework. Indeed, because the audience can never fully enter the fiction of the play, this level of critique functions somewhere outside of it; the critique itself occupies this liminal prologic space and, from that position, the audience might also think about the formation of nationalistic narratives writ large. By betraying the subjectivity of the prologic, authorial space—by making its agenda so rhetorically blatant—Shakespeare forces a re-evaluation of the manner in

which other narratives are formed. The play becomes less a play about Henry and more a play about the making of a “Henry.”

Implicit in this argument is the assumption that *Henry V*'s prologic spaces had an audience, and a sophisticated audience at that. While there is no evidence other than Heminges and Condell's assertions that the version of the play preserved in the First Folio was ever performed, I would suggest that the maximal version of the play was at the very least designed with an audience in mind. As I hope to have demonstrated, Shakespeare invests his prologic spaces with his faith in audiences' abilities to perceive subtleties; it would be a shame, then, if *Henry V*'s extensive, obtrusive—which is to say not-so-subtle—use of the prologic spaces, languished on the shelves until the First Folio reintroduced it. I prefer to think that this play would have marked, for at least some audiences, a remarkable use of the early modern prologic space that does not attempt to control out of self-interest but only to guide its audience to a contemplative engagement with the theater, the world, and the narratives that each presents.

CHAPTER V

“IN THE PERSON OF THE IDIOT OUR PLAYMAKER”:

THOMAS NASHE AND THE EXPANSIVE PROLOGUE

In the two preceding chapters we have seen, first, John Lyly using the prologic spaces of his plays to advance a specific personal agenda as he constructs an authorial persona and, second, Shakespeare using his prologic spaces to challenge his interpreting audience to rethink their relationship to plays. Put another way, Lyly’s prologues reflect upon the playwright’s initiative in constructing reading, while Shakespeare’s deploy a prologic agitation that reflects the role of the audience in the production of plays. Both playwrights tack in different directions vis-à-vis the audience: the former rhetorically constructs the manner in which his plays’ auditors understand him while the latter wants them to better understand the plays as such.

This chapter will explore Thomas Nashe’s uses of the prologic space in his one extant play, *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* (1592, 1600), which represents an amalgam of these two ways of constructing the audience’s relationship to plays and their playwrights.¹ Specifically, Nashe extends his prologic figure—a composite of the actor,

¹ Critics generally make much of the generic distinction that Toy makes in his opening: “nay, ‘tis no Play neyther, but a shewe” (75). Most follow Hibbard’s medieval distinction between “play” and “show,” classifications recognized at Cambridge in the period. R. G. Howarth considers it an interlude, thus situating it among other performance pieces performed in country homes. C. L. Barber places it alongside Shakespeare’s festive comedies in its retention of many elements of popular Elizabethan pageants and entertainments. In noting its “thin plot, much singing and dancing, [and] beautiful or eccentric costumes,” McGinn likens it to “a typical Broadway musical extravaganza” (52); with reference to Toy’s own critique, however, (“you will never have any ward-robe wit while you live” [1818-19]), I am not sure that the costumes were especially beautiful or eccentric. Posluszny helpfully summarizes: “The difficulty in categorizing the play is also rooted in its variety of styles and characters” (13). As the following will

Toy, and the prologic character he plays “as a *Chorus*” (91)², the ghost of Will Summer, Henry VIII’s jester—into the play proper as a means of rhetorical control that spans the entire play. This kind of extension of the prologic space into the play, which I am calling an example of “expansive prologic space,” resembles Shakespeare’s use of the chorus as it has just been discussed in the preceding chapter. In perhaps the most fundamental way Nashe’s expansive prologue functions at the same level as Shakespeare’s; both seem to insist upon their plays’ material existence as a way of never allowing the playgoing audience to settle completely into the fiction of the performance. In the case of *Henry V* this facilitates an engagement with the play as a playwright’s construct and asks the audience to consider the subjectivity inherent to the creation of narratives, whether they be the stories of a playwright or those constructed by—or inherited from—the auditors themselves. As we shall see, however, Nashe’s use of the expansive prologue is complemented and complicated by the presence of an even less-embedded prologic voice, embodied by the composite Toy. In *Summer’s Last Will* the sense of prologic agitation is less a matter of implication and more of a force to be reckoned with by the auditors and, indeed, by the playwright himself. This is to say that, if Shakespeare’s use of the chorus represents a nuanced manipulation of a classical and prologic paradigm, then Nashe’s introduction of Toy more directly, and much more insistently, engages the notions of the play as a construct of the playwright’s mind and of the audience’s inevitable intervention in the making of plays’ meanings.

hopefully bear out, I think that the inability to adequately define *Summer’s Last Will*’s genre has much to do with Nashe’s integration of a prose style adapted from his pamphleteering invective.

² Citations of *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* are from McKerrow’s edition of the play. McKerrow uses continuous lineation for the play, which my parenthetical citations follow.

In what follows I will examine the implications of Nashe's prologic project through *Summer's Last Will*. For starters, his use of the expansive prologue does not simply provide a means of rhetorical control over the audience as one might expect from the foregoing discussions of prologic spaces. Nashe's prologic voice does not guide the auditors, steering their reading of the stage action in an authorially advantageous direction; on the contrary, his Toy is constructed from the very beginning as a pointedly antagonistic voice in the play. Unlike Shakespeare's Chorus or Rumour, however, Toy pointedly contests the playwright himself, in fact vowing revenge for giving him the bit part of the Prologue. While this idea of the Prologue being a less-than-adequate role for the actor exemplifies one of the ways in which Nashe acknowledges prologic conventions from the period, the play is quick to insist on its own alternative uses of the prologic space that depart from traditional models. On the one hand, Toy-as-Will is a festive fool, a vice character whose predilection for critique and jest run as deep as popular English drama itself;³ on the other hand, however, this composite character is no more than an elaborate mask for Nashe himself which he only dons in the most cursory of ways.

In spite of this patina of defensive posturing, Nashe—who never shied from controversy in his life as a public writer, for better or worse—expresses deeply authorial concerns through his expansive prologic space. This chapter, then, closely examines this sometime-playwright's prologic space as well as the authorial anxieties that one might associate with Nashe during the period of *Summer's Last Will and Testament's*

³ *Mankynde*, for example, is considered the first popular English play (Bevington 18) and has the vice Myschyffe vaunt onto the stage and interrupt the main character.

performance, hot on the heels of the playwright's penning of his share in the Martin Marprelate controversy.⁴ More specifically, I will argue that Nashe's manipulations of the prologic space in *Summer's Last Will* are consonant with the means and methods of printed marginalia in the period. This is to say that Nashe's use of an expansive prologic space mimics on the stage the ways in which the margins were being used in Martinist and anti-Martinist works. Moreover, the prologic spaces of *Summer's Last Will* echo—or in most cases prefigure—many of the authorial concerns that Nashe expresses elsewhere in his work, and chief among them is an anxiety over the interpretational agency of the reader. His expansive prologic spaces, then, become a forum to lament—and an avenue toward mitigating—the very aspect of the audience/playwright dynamic that Shakespeare, for example, embraced. Although *Summer's Last Will* is his only extant play, it more than bears out the prevalence of an authorial anxiety rooted in a sense of helplessness in the face of the interpreting, usurping forces with whom the authorial figure competed.

Contextualizing Toy

Nashe's *Summer's Last Will* demonstrates a clear recognition of conventional prologic precedent. The primary example of this is the inset prologue that Toy ostensibly performs from his scripted part. Upon completing his performance of this "scurvuy *Prologue*" (26), which is forty-two prose lines in length, he chastises his playwright for having "made a Prologue longer then his Play" (74-75). The comedy of this prologue's prolixity is the inverse problem that Hamlet cited for the *Gonzago* prologue: there are

⁴ On the Marprelate scandal, cf. Chapter III, note 5 above.

expected parameters as to the lengths of prologues and Toy attests that his playwright's has the potential to try an auditor's patience. Nevertheless this does not stop Toy, likely the only professional actor among a troupe of boy actors, from complaining that he has been assigned a bit part; for he vows to "be reveng'd on [Nashe] to the uttermost" (88) because he feels that the playwright should "have let me [have] the best part" (87-88).⁵ In their argument that prologues were generally played by transitioning actors, Bruster and Weimann suggest that, because the prologue immediately precedes the entrance of a play's primary character in the opening moments of the play proper, the Prologue could never double with this main role. Toy's incredulity at his being assigned the ostensibly insignificant role of Prologue, then, suggests an understanding of the lowered expectations for the skill required to play the part since he clearly considers the role beneath his elevated abilities.

The inset prologue itself also provides a grand reflection of Nashe's engagement with his contemporaries' prologic style, namely that of his Martin Marprelate cohort John Lyly. The prologue, written "in an old vayne of similitudes" (17), draws comparisons between a series of exempla gathered from fabulous natural history and the conditions of the present performance:

⁵ There is a relative consensus among critics that Toy was the lone professional actor in the troupe, based in large part on this complaint and on his (actually) significant role in the play. As to the other parts in the play, however, there is some disagreement: Hilliard, for example, notes that the play was "performed at least in part by boys" (49), while Geller suggests that "the actors were most likely members of Whitgift's household" (148). Best also posits that "it was probably presented by a company child actors [...] a year after Lyly's actors, the Paul's boys, had been suppressed in 1591" (3) in suggesting that Nashe used the displaced Paul's boys and a found "shew," penned by Lyly, which Nashe then expanded into the version of the play that is extant. McKerrow doubts that the Archbishop "would have risked infecting his household with plague by entertaining actors from London at such a time" (4:419). Hibbard follows Chambers's suggestion that the chief actors were members of Whitgift's household, both of whom doubt that the boy actors, experienced as they were, would refer to themselves as "novices" in the inset prologue (Hibbard 89; Chambers, *Elizabethan* 4:453).

Politianus speaketh of a beast who, while hee is cut on the table, drinketh, and represents the motions and voyces of the living creature. Such like foolish beasts are we, who, whilst we are cut, mocked, & flowted at, in every mans common talke, will notwithstanding proceed to shame our selves, to make sport. (44-49)

The would-be self-critique in these lines—the players being “foolish beastes”—pairs with the prologue’s earlier assertion they are “novices, that here betray our imperfections” (34). Both of these lines exemplify the kind of humility that was prevalent in Lyly’s early prologues.⁶ In addition, the insistence at the end of the prologue that for “Deepe reaching wits, heere is no deepe stream for you to angle in” (64-65) echoes the defensive posturing inherent to the Lylian court prologue’s suggestion that any offensive matter in the plays should be disregarded as chaff from the intended laudatory wheat. Indeed, Hibbard considers the inset prologue of *Summer’s Last Will* to be a “clever parody of the Euphuistic manner” (102), a point which Best validates in noting that “the far-fetched similitude was one of the gimmicks of Euphuism which was most open to ridicule” (5).⁷ Given the weight of the evidence—the auditors are likely to have known of both Nashe’s and Lyly’s involvement, at Whitgift’s behest, in answering the Martinist critiques of the church; the possibility that the play was performed by boy actors (perhaps even Lyly’s own Paul’s boys); Lyly’s fame as a Euphuist; and, to an audience that keeps the company of a Privy Counselor, their likely familiarity with court performances of Lyly’s plays—it stands to reason that Nashe’s engagement with the prologic style of his contemporary would have been evident to the playgoers at Croydon.

⁶ Cf. particularly the prologues to *Campaspe* and *Sapho and Phao*.

⁷ Best, however, is arguing that the prologue is in fact Lyly’s and that Nashe simply augmented it—and the rest of the found show—with his own material. Cf n. 5 above.

Nashe's apparent recognition of prologic conventions, however, gives way to his own prologic project that lay in direct opposition to this "old" Lylian model. As I have already noted, the prologic Toy characterizes this as a lengthy and "scurvuy *Prologue*." Of course Toy is presented as an alternative authorial voice in the play and may therefore lead one to conclude that his distaste for the prologue actually endorses it: insofar as Toy is always already inscribed by Nashe, his raillery may have been understood simply as festive jesting and, thus, written off as a tongue-in-cheek gesture toward a humility topos. Indeed, the Euphuistic style had fallen from favor by the early 1590s and this kind of public flouting would have had some resonance with the audience. One should not, however, confuse the persona of Nashe as "the Idiot our Playmaker" (22) and the author himself. In his *Strange News of the Intercepting Certain Letters* (1592)—his reply to Gabriel Harvey's *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets* which had attacked Nashe's presumption in *Pierce Penniless*—Nashe admits "Euphues I read when I was a little ape in Cambridge, and then I thought it was *Ipse ille*: it may be excellent good still, for ought I know, for I lookt not on it this ten yeare: but to imitate it I abhorre, otherwise than it imitates *Plutarch*, *Ovid*, and the choisest Latine Authors" (McKerrow 1:319). Admittedly this says nothing of Nashe's opinion of Lyly's dramatic oeuvre, but the implication that *Euphues*'s time had passed resonates in Toy's indictment of *Summer's Last Will*'s inset prologue being "in an old vayne of similitudes" (17). Additionally, Toy later categorizes his playwright as "one of those Hieroglificall writers, that, by the figures of beasts, planets, and of stones, express the mind" (591-93),

a clear condemnation of the very kind of “similitudes” that are woven into the inset prologue.

The very fact that Toy levels these indictments is symptomatic of the most fundamental departure from prologic convention: Nashe expands his prologic space, allowing Toy’s quasi-authorial prologic voice to resonate throughout the play. And resonate it does. Having vowed revenge on his playwright, Toy adopts a persona of his own, Will Summer, “and mean not to put it off till the play be done. Ile sit as *Chorus*, and flowte the Actors and him [his playwright] at the end of every Sceane:” (90-92). Delivering on this promise, Toy’s interjections generally “flowte” the play’s constituents, as after the first song, for example, he notes that the singers could be “a couple of pratty [i.e. pretty] boyes, if they would wash their faces, and were well breecht [i.e. flogged] an houre or two” (117-18). He later delivers a similar backhanded compliment to the personification Harvest, who in Toy’s estimation, “hath done reasonable well” (952) for “a slaving foole, that hath no conceyte in any thing but in carrying a wand in his hand with commendation when he runneth by the high way side” (949-51). He is not always so clever in constructing his critiques, however: he rather plainly asserts, for example, that Solstitium, one of Summer’s officers, “is an asse, perdy” and that “this play is a gally-maufrey” (421-22).⁸

⁸ One should note the Lylian echo in this line as well: in *Midas* the prologic voice laments the changing of English tastes, noting that “what heretofore hath beene served in severall dishes for a feaste, is now minced in a charger for a Gallimaufry [i.e., a stew]” (Paul’s, 1.0.17-19).

As one might expect, Toy often finds occasion to turn his critical eye to “the Idiot our Playmaker” as well. After a lengthy—and uncharacteristically uninterrupted⁹—exchange between Summer and his officers, Toy facetiously suggests that “the Poet is bribed of some that have a messe of creame to eate, before my Lord goe to bed yet” (586-87). The notion that the playwright is padding the play so that his audience might finish their dessert is of a kind with Toy’s earlier admission, after Vertumnus waxes philosophical on the virtues of beggary, that “I was almost asleep; I thought I had bene at a Sermon” (337-38). The prologic voice is nothing if not consistent in his distaste for overlong passages, especially when “we come hither to laugh and be merry” (346). Nor is he hesitant to offer assistance to the “beggarly Poet that writ it” (348):

he knows not how to mend [i.e. emend] himselfe. Well, rather then he shall have no employment but licke dishes, I will set him a worke my selfe, to write in prayse of the arte of stouping, and howe there was never and famous Thresher, Porter, Brewer, Pioner, or Carpenter, that had streight backe. Repayre to my chamber, poore fellow, when the play is done, and thou shalt see what I say to thee. (349-56)

Toy not only criticizes the play and the playwright, but suggests that he might be able to do just as well with the writing.

Of course the passage is in the prologic character’s jesting spirit; later, however, Toy demonstrates that he actually has something of a discerning dramatic eye. In pleading his case to Summer, Autumn suggests that Winter’s offspring, Christmas and Back-winter, be summoned to confirm Autumn’s claim that Winter is “a most insaciate miserable carle [i.e. churl]” (1500). Accordingly, Christmas—a humbug of song and

⁹ Using McKerrow’s lineation, 142 lines pass between Toy’s interjections, which is a statistical outlier. In this edition, “Will Summer” has thirty-two speaking cues, and on average the number of lines that intervene between his cues is only fifty-four. This speaks to Toy’s insistent presence throughout the play.

hospitality—appears to be the play’s Puritan caricature and Back-winter—who, in part, pledges patricide—is simply belligerent. Toy takes exception to Back-winter not because he grows weary of lengthy diatribes, as one might expect, but because the character does not seem dramaturgically appropriate:

This *Back-winter* playes a rayling part to no purpose; my small learning finds no reason for it, except as a Back-winter or an after winter is more raging tempestuous and violent then the beginning of Winter, so he brings him in stamping and raging as if he were madde, when his father is a jolly milde quiet olde man, and stands still and does nothing. The court accepts of your meaning; you might have writ in the margent of your play-booke, Let there be a fewer rushes laide in the place where *Back-winter* shall tumble, for fear of raying his cloathes: or set downe, Enter *Back-winter*, with his boy bringing a brush after him, to take off the dust if need require. But you will ne’re have any ward-robe wit while you live. (1804-19)

Here we have Toy engaging the play proper, if you will, in a manner much more thoughtful than the majority of his comments; he draws upon his “small learning” to work through the playwright’s rationale for the character of Back-winter. Beginning with the initial thought that Back-winter is “rayling” for no discernible reason—and “the rayling part” both Toy and Nashe know well—Toy works his way to the realization that the playwright juxtaposes Back-winter and Winter so as to represent their opposing degrees of severity. In this passage, then, we see him reading the action onstage, and in declaring that “the court accepts of your meaning” he no doubt refers to both the court in which cases are argued as well as to the courtiers who listen to the play alongside Whitgift.

The critique of Back-winter also exhibits another moment in which Toy offers a suggestion to the playwright; this time, however, instead of a facetious offer to help him write a piece of pedantry on stooping, the prologic voice offers genuine notes, as it were,

on the staging of the scene. The suggestion that the playwright should have made provisions to protect Back-winter's costume when he tumbled onstage comes from the voice of experience: insofar as Back-winter "playes a rayling part" he bears a resemblance to the Vice character of the morality tradition, a contrarian position very similar to that which Toy occupies in *Summer's Last Will*.¹⁰ Toy's suggestions, then, have merit. Of course the advice comes with a price: the playwright must eventually be flouted, and Toy obligingly criticizes him for failing to account for wardrobe issues. Even this insult, however, is laced with practicality; Toy's observations come from his experience as an actor and his criticism is designed, in part, to humble his playwright for having only a sense of plays' designs and not the actor's awareness of practical details.¹¹

It is wise, however, to consider the source of criticism that is based on dramaturgical design, for it is launched by an actor's persona and targeted at the playwright's persona. The details themselves are the products of Nashe's pen. His attention to detail, in fact, is one of the few positive qualities that critics have found in Nashe's work. McGinn characterizes Nashe as "a reporter" and likens the detail in *Summer's Last Will* to his *The Choise of Valentines*—"a remarkably vivid piece of pornography"—in that both "are negative evidence that his true genius lay in his ability

¹⁰ Geller (164) makes the astute distinction that, while many kinds plays from the history of English drama have "a knavish commentator," those characters generally speak from inside of the play while Toy occupies a uniquely liminal position.

¹¹ This is, at least in part, an issue of class. If we consider that Toy, as Will, speaking as one of the masses (a lowly actor) has no patience for pedantry or moralizing, then this issue of play writing versus play acting—admitting stereotypes of the former as cerebral and the latter as laborious—is cut from a similar, if not the same, cloth as the class divide assumed in the putative playwright's tendency toward wordiness and Toy's intolerance of it. Additionally, as Hibbard points out, Nashe had a predilection for popular phrasing (3). Cf. Posluszny 26.

to report and interpret the Elizabethan scene to his own contemporaries” (56).¹² In noting that “his vision was piercing but not comprehensive; it could flash brilliantly but not cast a steady light,” Stanley Wells characterizes Nashe as “a miniaturist forced by the circumstances of his time to work on canvasses too large for him” (20). In similarly backhanded compliments of Nashe’s eye for particulars, McKerrow criticizes, “he was indeed faulty in language and crude in ideas, often careless, often ignorant, but what he saw he could write” (5:1), while G. R. Hibbard offers that even “with the sharpest of eyes for the surface of life, he cannot see below the surface” (x). Both critics refer to Nashe’s entire body of work, but their characterizations seem to apply to his one extant play as well. If one can accept the fact that Nashe had seen the plays of his contemporaries, as his apparent knowledge of Lylian prologues attests, then it would follow that Nashe would indeed be familiar with just the kinds of details of stage business which the inscribed critic Toy brings to light. In using his prologic character as a mouthpiece, then, Nashe demonstrates a certain level of theatrical acumen, in spite of his other shortcomings.

The virtue, in *Summer’s Last Will*, of details such as these is that they facilitate a heightened sense of awareness of the play as such. Sherri Geller, for example, suggests that “Nashe’s putatively extempore and unauthorized commentator forces the audience to focus on the theatrical event [a term which she uses to shun generic distinctions] more than on the fiction of the play proper, interfering with the suspension of disbelief that the

¹² McGinn, as a point of reference, places *Nashe’s Choise of Valentines* alongside Norman Mailer’s *American Dream*, which “interrupts an account of a murder to present the explicit details of illicit sexual intercourse” (56).

fiction might have induced in the audience” (152). Toy’s very presence as an expansive prologic figure who shows a predilection for interjecting hinders the audience’s ability to enter into the fiction of a play that enacts the bequeathing of Summer’s legacy, which is at least the performance’s titular promise. Additionally, though, the quality of Toy’s interjections amplifies his liminality and, as result, the sense of the play’s materiality.¹³ Compounding Toy’s references to the dramaturgy of the play and to the playwright’s abilities as a dramaturg are Toy’s own reminders that the play is put on by actors. Specifically, when Summer sends Vertumnus offstage to gather Christmas and Back-winter, Toy calls him by his name: “This same *Harry Baker* is such a necessary fellow to go on arrants, as you shall not finde in a country” (1567-69). Here Toy elides the action on the stage with the person of the actor and not his character, an elision that is also a subtle reminder of the fact that Toy himself is only thinly-veiled as his character, Will Summer. In an earlier reference to Baker, Toy jestingly alludes to some familiarity with the actors prior occupations in revealing that “this fellow hath bin a tapster in his daies” (193-94). One would be wise not to accept Toy’s claim that this is “truth” (193); however, the impetus of the remark nonetheless leads the auditor out of the play’s world and into the real world in which actors with past lives are playing parts in a play.

This intrinsic interest in its own materiality is apropos for a play written and performed in the autumn of 1592, a time when London was threatened by a virulent

¹³ By “the play’s materiality” I mean to imply the play’s existence as such: consciously constructed by a playwright and performed on the platform at a particular moment. The ephemeral play cannot be a material artifact in the way that we think of, say, a book. Although it is grounded in an extant quarto, I am thinking more about the play in the context of the performance (or, at least, of the performance as represented by that literally material quarto book). “Materiality” denotes that the performed play is always already a construct with a historical specificity, which the book, as such, memorializes.

outbreak of plague.¹⁴ Surely as a consequence of this outbreak John Whitgift, the Archbishop of Canterbury and sometime patron of Thomas Nashe, retired to the fresher air of his country palace in Croydon. He seems to have hosted guests during this time—perhaps other plague refugees with the means and connections to escape from, or postpone a return to, the city—and in order to celebrate the changing seasons and the gathering of the harvest, Whitgift asked Thomas Nashe to produce an appropriate play.¹⁵ Following C. L. Barber’s treatment of the play in *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy*, critics indeed consider the play a festive, holiday play that brings together a great many festive traditions; yet the reality of their plague-ravaged city surely lurked in the minds of the play’s audience. To this effect, Hibbard notes that *Summer’s Last Will* “is pervaded by a sense of mutability, subdued to a pitch at which it does not conflict with the general lightness of the tone, yet ever present as a kind of ground bass” (90). Likewise, in a discussion of the manner in which the play’s audience would have understood the Puritan belief that the plague was the embodiment of God’s anger—and perhaps felt uneasy about being in audience of a damnable festival play—Hilliard posits that “occasional references keep the plague in the minds of the audience without letting its grim reality undermine the holiday spirit of the play” (52). I would suggest, however,

¹⁴ The precise month for the play’s performance, and to a lesser extent the year, are points of much contention in Nashe criticism. Chambers (*Elizabethan* 3:451-2) and McKerrow (4:416-18) discuss both date and year. The internal references that critics generally cite are those to a particularly dry Thames (454), and the presence of plague and consequent postponement of Michealmas term (1881). Additionally, Posluszny suggests that “the allusion to ‘the horses lately sworn to be stolen’ (252-53) refers to an incident which occurred in September or October of 1592 involving the retinue of Count Mompelgard at Windsor” (10).

¹⁵ There is debate about the genesis of the play as well, primarily centered upon who was in attendance. Discussion focuses on internal evidence from the plays—as do the arguments for the kinds of players (cf. n.5 above) and those pertaining to the play’s dating (cf. n. 14 above)—and wonders if the Queen was in attendance. Cf., McKerrow, 4:416-18; Chambers, *Elizabethan* 3:452; and Posluszny, 10-11.

that the plague was a much more pervasive, and perhaps invasive, reality: as Hilliard himself reminds us, “the outbreak that began in 1592 was to kill an estimated 23,000 Londoners” (52), and Croydon was but eight miles south of the city.

The play itself bears out a focus on the ubiquitous pall of plague and death that hangs over the hall at Croydon. At its core, *Summer's Last Will* dramatizes the death of an ill Summer, who enters the stage under the support of Autumn and Winter. Moreover, his entrance is accompanied by a dirge that, in its first stanza, reminds the auditors “All good things vanish, lesse then in a day, / Peace, plenty, pleasure, sodainly decay” (107-8). Again as Summer nears his end he requests “some doleful ditty to the Lute, / That may complaine my neere approaching death” (1573-74). The result is Nashe’s lyric, “Adieu, Farewell Earth’s Bliss” (1574-1615), which contains the refrain “I am sick, I must dye; / Lord have mercy on us.” Echoing this final line, even the knave Toy, who until now has lacked any emotional sincerity, is moved: “Lord, have mercy on us, how lamentable ‘tis” (1617). Wells considers this “the cathartic moment of the play and a high point in Nashe’s art” in which “the pretense of illusion is dropped” and all “are as one, afraid of death” (11). In repeating the already oft-repeated refrain from the lyric, Toy does not speak to, but rather for and with an audience for whom these lines would have a poignant resonance: Posluszny notes that “the refrain itself is the response from the Litany of Saints, which was customarily recited through the streets of London in plague time” (23) and Hilliard suggest that it “echoes the *Book of Common Prayer* and was the phrase posted as a warning on the doors of the infected” (53). More than merely having “occasional references,” the play proper is framed by—and its action defined

by—this foreboding sense of Summer’s death, in spite of Toy’s jesting interventions. In many ways, then, the play’s focus on its own materiality may be seen as symptomatic of this much more pervasive sense of threat; the fact that the prologic voice is invested in laying bare the fact that the audience is only watching a production—performed by actors and written by a playwright—belies the sense that a festive escape is not possible.

Authorial Anxiety

Suggesting that the play’s interest in its own materiality is a manifestation of a contextual, cultural anxiety over the plague, however, merely indicates generally the authorial anxieties that Thomas Nashe must have felt acutely. Chief among these anxieties was the audience’s subjective interpretational prerogative. In what follows I will map this particular authorial concern through the prologic spaces of *Summer’s Last Will*, for these ubiquitous reminders of the play’s materiality reveal that Nashe more often than many seems troubled by the notion that, in performance, he may lose control over his play. The aspect of theatricality that Shakespeare prized—the audience’s ability to “deck our kings”—is one which Nashe meets with great ambivalence: while he necessarily relies on the audience’s interpretation, submitting to that interpretation means yielding his work. More specifically, this section locates the moments in which Nashe’s authorial anxiety finds expression in his prologic space, primarily through the figure of Toy and his interactions with the play proper.

Just as Nashe recognized and engaged with the conventions of contemporary prologic form in his inset prologue, so too he pays homage to audience interpretation, this fundamental aspect of the theatrical endeavor. As Toy prepares to rehearse the

“scurvuy Prologue” that his playmaker has written for him, he implores the audience, “if you bee good fellowes, give it the hearing, that you may judge of him hereafter” (234). Although the audience is not invited to pass judgment on the play directly, their interpretation of the inset prologue acts as a vehicle for their critical engagement with the playwright’s abilities. Just as Toy himself will later preside as “court” in judging the “rayling part” of *Back-winter*, he here plays on the notion of “the hearing” which will allow the audience to pass judgment on one of the play’s component parts. Not only does he recognize that their engagement with the inset prologue necessarily leads to judgment, but also he guides this act of interpretation in the same rhetorical manner that we have seen in the interludes, in Lyly’s plays, and in Shakespeare’s plays: if they “bee good fellowes” they will listen as Toy plays the part he has been assigned. Moreover, he has already framed the playwright as an “Idiot,” “a Foppe & an Asse” (22) and, once his recitation is concluded, inquires “doe you not laugh at him for Coxcombe?” (73-74). Similar to the examples in the preceding chapters, the prologic voice here confirms a tendency to guide the interpreting audience, in this case toward an interpretation of the playmaker.

An alternative way to frame this controlling impetus is through the manner in which Toy’s staged interaction between the inset prologue and the audience may in fact model Nashe’s views of early modern audiences’ interactions with plays.¹⁶ Even as the

¹⁶ To this end Hibbard suggests that “to a large extent he [Will] is an ordinary playgoer of the day. He has no use whatever for moralizing” and “like Polonius, he is all for a jig” (103); and perhaps more to the point, “Will” “is a combination of the ordinary playgoer on the one hand and Tom Nashe on the other” (104). Hibbard also points out that “the individuality that Will takes on comes mainly from the lively colloquial idiom that Nashe endows him with” (103), a point which Posluszny verifies with reference to R.

layering of the play's voices begins to take shape, this attention to modeling is retained: Nashe ventriloquizes Toy who in turn adopts the persona of Will Summer, the latter of whom engages the play proper—his “engagement” taking the general form of “flowt[ing]” the actors and the playwright—thus continuing to mimic the crucial act of interpretation, if only for a professed comic effect. This back-and-forth between the prologic voice—in the adopted persona of a fool of his own—and the play proper, then, parodies the audience's critical engagement with the play. Viewed through this lens the play's focus on its own materiality, insofar as it has been framed by Toy throughout the foregoing discussion, is of a piece with attention to interaction.

Sherri Geller argues that this antagonistic interaction between Toy/Will and the play proper has the effect of subtly mirroring as well as obscuring the main plot's focus on illiberal patrons. In opposition to readings of the dying Summer as a moral center for a festive comedy, she convincingly catalogues the ways in which he should be read as “an illiberal, wrathful, and less-than-respected lord who has no moral superiority and no punitive measures of any significance to his subordinates” (162). Summer's illiberality, she suggests, leads his officers to repudiate their lord as they are systematically judged unfit and dispatched. Accordingly, she locates Toy “in that part of the fictive world which masquerades as the real” (164), and posits that from this position he castigates the Nashe persona—who has given him a bit part—in a manner concomitant with Summer's officers in the play proper. By the same token, voicing the challenge to illiberal patronage through the mouth of the comic fool figure of Toy/Will obscures the critique:

W. Dent's study of proverbial language in non-Shakespearean drama, which “cites over 115 proverbs in *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, twice as many as most plays written in the early 1590's” (26).

“the lively and disruptive commentator, who often mocks Summer’s morbidity and moralizing, is another distraction,” which is to say, a distraction adding to that of the upstaging song and dance routines of the officers’ scenes (Geller 153). Geller goes on to read the critique of illiberal patronage in *Summer’s Last Will* alongside similar critiques in Nashe’s own contemporary prose works, and thus suggests that the play implies a critique of Nashe’s host and patron, Whitgift.

If Nashe was, in fact, issuing a topical reference to Whitgift, the notion that Nashe uses the mask of Toy/Will as a shroud to obscure such a critique makes good sense given audiences’ tendency to read into the plays that they hear in performance. Geller clarifies this point:

Perhaps because allegory was a well-known conveyor of topicality, Nashe devised a duplicative strategy of indirection: he included in his play a putatively nonfictional and hence ‘authoritative’ commentary that deemphasizes and also amplifies the sensitive content in the fictional text it frames, thus preempting and (mis)guiding interpretive activity. (149)

Part of the fiction is that Toy, in fact, very clearly separates himself from his assigned role: after he has read his prologue and rehearsed “what can be made of Summers last will & Testament” (77-78), he declares “I care not what I say now, for I play no more than you heare; & some of that you heard to (by your leave) was extempore” (85-87). This is to say that, although he has taken liberties to squeeze in some extemporaneous lines—those which berate the playwright—his assigned role has ended and he thus marks the full transition to his ostensibly extra-dramatic role as the expansive prologic voice. Geller considers this to be a “disclaimer writ large” (177) in the vein of the conventional prologic disclaimers such as that in the inset prologue that warns “deepe

reaching wits” not to angle in this stream. It seems somewhat incongruous, however, that the author of *Pierce Penniless*, published just a few months earlier in 1592, would have been so bold as to critique his patron, regardless of his subterfuge. Hibbard characterizes the end of 1591, when a second edition of Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* was published—sans the dedicatory epistle Nashe had written for the first edition—as a time of marked hardship: “How Nashe managed to live at all during this lean time is something of a puzzle [...] The very title of *Pierce Penniless*, pronounced ‘Purse Penniless’ in Elizabethan English, is both an indication of the straits to which he was reduced and the spirit in which he faced his difficulties” (50). To be sure, this reads like a recipe for a writer to lash out against illiberal patrons, but an acute attack on a powerful patron, in a time of plague no less, would have been ill-advised. Of course the acerbic Thomas Nashe that history has come to know may not have been dissuaded by decorum. Hilliard has argued that *Summer’s Last Will*, in part, is a subtle critique of Puritanism that may not have played well to a “grave and powerful audience” that included “many moderates, including courtiers and church officials, [who] sympathized with Puritan ethics while rejecting their call for ecclesiastical reform” (61). Just as such concern did not hinder the mild critique of Puritanism, a quibble over Nashe’s pecuniary interests in no way precludes the possibility that Whitgift was the implied target of a critique of illiberal patrons: as Hilliard points out, “probably Nashe was too profane and outspoken to last long in the Archbishop’s employ” (50). Such topical critiques, in fact, would have necessitated the elaborate shell game that Nashe plays with the layered identities of the play’s prologic space.

Whether or not Nashe was critiquing Whitgift, one of the great virtues of Geller's argument is her extensive discussion of the ways in which the Toy/Will plotline mirrors the themes of Summer's plotline. Following this observation further, the parallels may be just as much about sustaining a critique of illiberality as they are about Nashe's familiarity with Lylian precedent; for Lyly's plays are laced with sub-plots involving pages who "parod[y] the dominant attitudes of the main plot" (Hunter 231). Hunter points out Lyly "is not the originator of this aspect of drama" (140); however, given Nashe's attention to Lyly's prologic techniques, as well as his recognition of *Euphues*, it stands to reason that Toy's incessant engagement with the play as such is another Lylian derivative. Of course this speaks to Wells's damning assertion that Nashe was not "an original thinker" (20), a condemnation stemming from the fact that the work for which he is best known, the anti-Martinist tracts and the exchanges with Gabriel and Richard Harvey, are merely reactionary. However, it also demonstrates an affinity with his aforementioned manipulation of prologic precedent in that one again sees Nashe manipulating convention to his own critical ends. The Toy narrative is not a sub-plot per se, but the form of the Lylian sub-plot, which parallels and critiques the main action, allows Nashe to construct an expansive prologue that reaches into the play proper. It is not so much that he borrows this organizing principle, but that this principle facilitates his creation of an alternative authorial voice. Put another way, in this play that is concerned in the utmost with its own materiality, a quasi-sub-plot structure carves out a space for the similarly quasi-authorial voice of Toy.

Returning to the suggestion that Toy models Nashe's understanding of audience interaction with the play, the prologic voice's quasi-authorial antagonism speaks volumes to precisely the kind of authorial anxiety alluded to at the head of this section. As Stanley Wells has it, "it's all very disarming" (9). More than simply a voice of critique that pushes against the playwright's authority, the audience's understanding of Toy would have been defined by an accretion of all of the representational forces acting on him: by his own fictive construction Toy is an autonomous figure; he is a fool character at liberty to critique authority; and he is the primary representative in a parallel plot that additionally marks him as a contentious voice in the play. Taken together, these components grant him the privileged position of critic, and when coupled with the fact that he represents the play's prologic voice, his critique presents a marked danger. To wit, it is not merely that he pushes against the playwright's authority in *Summer's Last Will*, but rather that he threatens to usurp the play itself.

Of course Toy is always already inscribed by Nashe and, thus, can never truly "usurp" the play; however, in this capacity as a construct of the playwright he serves as a symbol of the threat that the autonomous, interpreting subject poses. The fear of such usurpation seems to plague the writer even until his final pamphlet, *Nashes Lenten Stuffe* (1599), in which he spends roughly a quarto leaf of the last gathering lamenting the manner in which critics "use mens writings like brute beasts, to make them draw which way they list" (3:215). His complaint is directed toward advocates—the "infant squib of the Inns of court" (3:213)—who "never reading to a period (which you shal scarce find in thirtie sheets of a lawyers declaration) whereby they might comprehend the intire

sence of the writer together, but disjoynt and teare every sillable betwixt their teeth severally” (3:214-15). Nashe is arguing that, in their haste to acquire fame, these malicious readers “will writhe and turne them [writers’ words] as they list, and make the author beleeve he meant that which he never did mean” (3:215). It must be granted that the whole of *Lenten Stuffe* is something of a rhetorical exercise; the piece is largely an encomium to the city of Yarmouth (with its red herring), to which Nashe fled in the uproar over his now-lost satire *Isle of Dogs* (performed 1597) and, by the author’s own admission, represents “the light cost of rough cast rhetoricke [with which the incident] may be tollerably playstered over” (3:154). Indeed, as Jonathan Crewe points out, Nashe’s “dramatization of these events [i.e. the presumed furor over *Isle of Dogs*] in *Lenten Stuffe* itself, together with the fact that he did escape and remain unmolested, suggests a certain tolerance or complicity on the part of the authorities” (94). Even as rhetorical defensiveness, the concern over how others read his texts rings clear.

Equally clear is the fact that Nashe considers the offense to be one against the act of reading; for the offenders parse only what is convenient to them, neglecting the “entire sense” of the work. In no uncertain terms he targets “Latinlesse dolts, saturnine heavy headed blunderers [...] such as count al Artes puppet-playes, and pretty rattles to please children” (3:216). Chastising critics in terms of education—categorizing them as “Latinlesse”—and with regard to their pretentious moral objections to plays, Nashe brings his invective to bear on the framing issue of *Lenten Stuffe*, his *Isle of Dogs*.¹⁷ It is

¹⁷ Hibbard helpfully recounts the narrative (235). In brief, Ben Jonson is thought to have completed the play; when it was staged a state intelligencer reported that it contained “very seditious and sclanderous matter.” This report led to a “restraint” on the theaters and the imprisonment of Ben Jonson and two other players. Nashe, catching wind of the trouble, fled to Yarmouth. Cf. McKerrow, 5:31 n.2.

assuredly no coincidence that the terms in which Nashe frames the events surrounding this play also focus on the point that his “entire sense” has been missed; or, rather, it is never allowed the light of day. At the outset of the pamphlet he refers to the play as “that infortunate imperfit Embrion of my idle houres, the Ile of Dogs” (3:153). Nashe provides an explanatory gloss in his margin: “An imperfit Embrion I may well call it, for I having begun but the induction and first act of it, the other foure acts without my consent, or the least guesse of my drift or scope, by the players were supplied, which bred both their trouble and mine too.” As the playwright frames it, the offending play was only begun by him and, without “the least guesse of [his] drift and scope,” apparently completed by forces outside of his control. In the absence of an extant text of the play, and knowing Nashe’s predilection for rhetorical framing, one must take this assertion with a grain of salt. True or not, however, the terms in which Nashe couches his innocence are again laced with the notion that his work—or at least a work with his name attached to it—has been misrepresented and, thus, misconstrued. The relation between this marginal defense and his tirade at the end of the text speaks to a continuity of thought: the two are linked in their anxieties over a writer’s work being appropriated by outside forces and made to represent something far afield from any authorial intention.

Recalling Nashe’s implicit anxiety over precisely this kind of usurpation in *Summer’s Last Will*, the *Isle of Dogs* fiasco has the potential to read something like a perverse instance of life imitating art: just as Toy threatens to take over his earlier play, so too does Jonson apparently commandeer Nashe’s embryonic *Isle*. I would suggest, though, that the congruence between the two has less to do with prophesy than with the

prevalence of Nashe's authorial anxiety. In the absence of substantive evidence, this marginal frame is all that one has to parse Nashe's involvement in *Isle of Dogs*. As a narrative, then, the gloss is no less the construct of the poet's mind than is the prologic figure of Toy. Taken together, one can see in these texts that Nashe was hounded by this concern over the interpreting audience usurping his work, whether it was a pamphlet or a play. It is important to note as well that he expresses this authorial anxiety, in each case, from appropriately authorial spaces: in the expansive prologic space in *Summer's Last Will* and, tellingly, in the margins of *Lenten Stuffe*. The final section of this chapter will tease out the implications for this elision of the prologue and the margin in Nashe's work, for his expressive use of the latter aids in framing the authorial nature of the former.

Marginal Authority

In his discussion of printed marginalia from the early modern period, William W. E. Slights suggests that, as one of the myriad forces that had a hand in producing meaning in early modern printed books, marginalia were designed to make texts accessible to their readers: "the reading experience itself needed to be constructed, and this meant building up readers' skills, their store of technical and historical information, and their capacity for moral enlightenment. This was the job for marginal annotation, the teacher in the text" (20). The authorial, guiding principle is clear, but Slights is careful to point out that "even as he mediates between text and reader, [the writer] produces fresh text that itself requires interpretation" (10); as the foregoing discussion demonstrates, such is the manner in which we are to read, for example, *Lenten Stuffe's* marginal

defense of *Isle of Dogs*. In addition to constructing a relationship between the reader and the text, printed marginalia also, in many cases, works to legitimize the authority of a printed work. Slights notes that the marginalia in early printed books were designed to prompt an association with earlier manuscript texts (5); thus “a good way to make a book seem important and, hence, marketable was to accentuate its affiliation with older traditions of textual production” (3). Returning to the example of *Lenten Stuffe*, the mere presence of marginalia is a commercially motivated decision; this decision, however, is based on the appeal of textual forebears. What may be read as a reversion to marginalia should not indicate that older was better; although this was true in some ways, it is much more directly about an appeal to the *auctoritas* of that which has come before.

In *Pierce Pennilesse His Supplication to the Devil* (1592), this legitimacy-seeking impulse does not end, of course, with a visual imitation of manuscript books; the marginal notes in *Pierce Pennilesse*, Nashe’s first foray into the textual periphery, rely upon an appeal to the actual *auctoritas* of literary—and not just book-related—forebears. This is to say that *Pierce Pennilesse* seeks legitimacy by appealing to, and through the appeal of, ancient authors. As the title indicates, *Pierce Penniless* recounts the eponymous character’s supplication to the devil, a drastic maneuver necessitated by his failure to find patronage. The main text of the supplication itself is preceded by a proem that laments society’s devaluation of wit and learning. The entirety of the text is buttressed by a great many marginal notes—on average roughly three to every leaf of the eight-gathering quarto—many of which simply serve as guideposts to the reader, signaling, for example, a “Description of greedinesse” (1:166) or a section on “The

defense of plays” (1:212). However the first gathering of the work—it’s “proem”—offers marginal notes that are entirely different in character from those in the main text. The first twelve marginal notes are Latin glosses of such ancient authors as Ovid, Horace, and Virgil. Read in the context of the proem, Nashe’s margins do not merely emulate the appearance of an older text; rather, they exemplify for the reader the very virtues that have fallen from favor in contemporary English culture. More than simply buttressing his central premise that scholarship should be more highly valued, however, Nashe’s citation of these literary authorities in this context has the added effect of performing and affirming his own scholarly, authorial position. This self-authorizing impetus did not go unnoticed by his pamphleteering rival, Gabriel Harvey. In the third letter of Harvey’s *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets* the writer attacks Nashe’s presumption in using scholarly Latin marginalia in *Pierce Pennilesse*, a volley to which Nashe responds in *Strange News*: “I did it to explaine to such expected spiefaults as though art, that it was no uncouth abhorrencie from the customes of former writers, for a man openly to bewaile his undeserved ill destinie” (1:308). To be sure, Nashe is attempting to validate the whole of *Pierce Pennilesse* on the grounds that the lament of a worthy-turned-pauper finds precedent in “former authors.” By the same token, however, Nashe’s riposte in *Strange News* is clearly an authorial defense against would-be “spiefaults” determined to mine a writer’s work for errors. The grounds on which the defense is based mimic the very kind of authorization in *Pierce Pennilesse*’s margins; for Nashe is not merely in search of a literary precedent for his character, but suggests a kinship with his authorial forebears that furnish his authority.

As Gabriel Harvey's attack suggests, though, the margins were an unstable site for authorial claims. Because the margins are tasked with guiding the reader, they provide an extra-textual, authorial voice that has the potential for duplicity. Slights notes that "an oppositional voice from the margins could engage a reader in lively debate with the centered text or at least establish an alternative view of the matters it dealt with there" (8); while Evelyn Tribble, in positing that "the margins and the text proper are in shifting relationships of authority," suggests that marginal notes are much less staid in their potential to "assume a contestatory or parodic relation to the text by which it stood" (6). Tribble suggests that Nashe would have understood the shifting sands of such claims to authority as those which he makes in *Pierce Pennilesse* primarily because of his familiarity with the "Martin Marprelate" writers' style. In these texts, she contends, the margins were a fluid space that allowed the Martinists to locate authority variously in the margins and the main text: "Martin breaks the boundaries of the page, positioning himself elusively both in the margin and in the center of the page in a parody of the humanist gloss" (109). In her estimation, the Martinists did not only redefine "the humanist use of the margin as a locus for consensus or community" (112)—which is to say, as an affirmation of a stable author/reader dynamic—but also, in destabilizing the interactions between main text and margin, perform "a parody of that typically humanist genre—the dialogue" (110). This tendency to invert conventional humanist discourse is defined by Martin as "lawful jesting," a strategy that "finally undoes him, since it enables the bishops to use his words to prove Martin's danger to the state" (115); "lawful jesting" seems to have been a gloss for acerbic satire.

Nashe had more than a passing familiarity with the methods of the Martinist critique. Tasked by Whitgift to respond to the inflammatory pamphlets in kind, Nashe developed an understanding of the elemental form of the Martinists and turned that form against them; to borrow a phrase from Tribble, he manages to “out-Martin Martin” (120). Tribble traces Nashe’s uses of the Martinist style into his quarrel with the Harveys as well, arguing that his proclivity for parody and jesting, particularly in the margins of these works, finds its roots in his early anti-Martinist writing (122-26). Returning to his thwarted appeal to *auctor*-ial precedence in *Pierce Pennilesse*, one might conjecture that in that early, non-Martinist work Nashe attempted to use the margins of his text to express his own authorial impulses; he learned, however, that the instability of the margin ensures that no claim to authority is safe from the interpreting subject. Whether or not he “learned” anything from Harvey’s attack on *Pierce Pennilesse*, between its publication in early 1592 and that of *Strange News* in December of the same year, Nashe seems to be on the cusp of a shift in his treatment of marginal material. From the relatively stable and conventional, if rhetorical, motivations inherent to the margins—using them as guideposts and as a locus for scholarly engagement with the main block text—he shifts toward much more interventional methods; in *Strange News* he, on the one hand, directly constructs his relationship to an outside text—his *Isle of Dogs*—and, on the other, interpolates passages from Harvey’s *Four Letters*, printing them alongside his critical commentary and thus, again, out-Martining Martin’s parody of the printed humanist dialogue.

This digression into the Martin Marprelate pamphlets and marginalia has been with an eye to contextualizing *Summer's Last Will*, the performance and likely composition of which are situated in this moment of transition. It is not a coincidence that, as Nashe is engaged with a shifting understanding of authorship and the margins, he pens a play that expands the typical prologic space into a running commentary that mimics in performance the pamphlets' interplay between text and margin. The jesting, parodic motivation of the Martinists, which Nashe will adopt in his later quarrel with the Harveys, finds a voice in Toy's reminders of the play's and the playwright's shortcomings. The contextualization of the play brings the play's interest in its own materiality into sharper focus as well: just as Nashe has displayed with Martin—and will display with Harvey—a guiding principle of his critical mode is to break an opponent's argument into its constituent parts and attack it in micro. Toy's criticisms of the writing of the railing part for Back-winter and of lengthy, over-philosophical speeches similarly use the mechanisms of the play against it. I am suggesting, then, that Toy's role in the play mirrors that of the anti-Martinist Nashe. The style and nature of Toy's critique of the play can best be understood as another of Nashe's exercises in expressing criticism from the margins of the text.

Of course just because he is on the margins does not make Toy marginal; he remains integral to the play, if for no other reason than that he embodies the dangers that the interpreting individual presents. If, as I have suggested, we can see in the Toy/Will figure an act of reading that, because of the nature of its critique, presents a direct challenge to authority, then it seems as though this prologic figure is performing the kind

of reading that Nashe himself was engaged in: his expansive prologic space mimics the same kind of interventionist reading that he has grown accustomed to by the autumn of 1592. In both his prose works and his play the act of interpretation amounts to the hostile takeover of the text that is read. In this manner, then, one sees that the nature of the threat posed by the interpreting individual is foremost in the playwright's mind. To paraphrase even the sharpest critic, Nashe wrote what he knew, and in *Summer's Last Will* it becomes clear that "what he knew" was not just stylistic imitation, or raillery, or parody—although he certainly "knew" all of these things. What brings these things together in the play is the anxiety that his public writing is never his to control.

The anxiety represented in Nashe's *Summer's Last Will* becomes a dominant characteristic of the most influential prologic exercises at and following the turn of the century. As Bruster and Weimann have noted, the signifying agency in and of the theater sees a shift in the 1590s from a poet-centered model to an audience-centered model. In Shakespeare's *Henry V* they find a willing engagement with the interpreting audience, a point to which my chapter on Shakespeare speaks as well. In Nashe, however, we glimpse the underbelly of the many-headed beast that the audience would come to represent for the most prolific in prologic endeavors, Ben Jonson. Nashe—like the writers of the interludes, like Lyly, and like Shakespeare—knew that the play ultimately belonged to the audience, and as their interpretational prerogative grew from learners of lessons to levelers of critique, the authorial position of the playwright became all the more precarious. The playwright's anxiety over this development is manifest in Nashe's play. As a means toward concluding, then, I will follow this anxiety to the end of

Elizabeth's reign, where Jonson's engagement with his audiences—of both performance and print—moves to the fore of his work, literally. Jonson's various prologics are often—like Nashe's—expansive and—also like Nashe's—indicative of the playwright's acute sense that the authorial imperative, in the context of dramatic endeavor, has a very precarious relationship with the audience.

CHAPTER VI

“WHAT’S PAST IS PROLOGUE”: CONCLUSIONS

By 1606, prologic tropes appear to have become readily available for satire: the Prologue to John Fletcher’s *The Woman Hater* (1606, 1607) declares, “Gentlemen, Inductions are out of date, and a Prologue in Verse is as stale, as a blacke Veluet Cloake, and a Bay Garland” (A2r). Although he is not announcing the death of the prologic form—his is, after all, a prologue in “plaine Prose thus” (A2r)—the Prologue’s ability to refer to such conventions in this manner speaks to the form’s ubiquity. As Bruster and Weimann suggest with regard to the Prologue’s ensemble—the cloak and bay garland—“the overwhelmingly casual reference to details of dress and stage properties may imply that the appearance and deportment of prologues was largely taken for granted” (25). The same might be said of the form, for the Prologue here does not only critique his “stale” accoutrements, but he also announces a departure from a presumably conventional verse form. A similar kind of turn on prologic convention takes place as early as 1600 in the prologic opening to Ben Jonson’s *Cynthia’s Revels* (1600, 1601) in which Jonson stages a feud between three boy actors—the play was put on by the Children of the Chapel in the Blackfriars Theatre—who vie for the right to read the prologue. Here Jonson draws upon a stereotypical view of the children themselves—engaged as they are in a petty, competitive squabble over the prologue and, more immediately, its symbolic stage property, the cloak—but he also has the boys use the cloak throughout this expansive opening to lampoon the audience. The cloak, then, is

bandied about, used to play “the ignorant critic” (1.0a.93) as well as to deck, eventually, the Prologue; Jonson’s expansion of the cloak’s utility mimics his expansion of the prologic space in this play, for the boys’ contest lasts for 205 lines before the first boy delivers the twenty-line prologue that begs for “gracious silence” (1.0b.1), insists upon the humility of “our doubtful author” (1.0b.4), and advances the Jonsonian doctrine of “Words upon action: matter above words” (1.0b.20).

Jonson’s expansion of the prologic space is not only a sign of its availability for such alterations, but, insofar as it typifies the playwright’s work at the turn of the century, the expansion also speaks to a specifically Jonsonian authorial anxiety. The “Induction” to *Cynthia’s Revels*, with its explicit jabs at the audience, enacts a jesting aggressiveness toward the “ignorant critic” in much the same way as Nashe’s expansion of *Summer’s Last Will’s* registers its playwright’s anxiety over the audience. I have already mentioned, at the head of Chapter IV, the dual prologues of Jonson’s *Poetaster*, the first of which features the embodiment of Envy chastising the playwright while the latter features “an armed Prologue” who defends him. We might add to these the even more Nashean prologics of Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599, 1600), which situates Cordatus and Mitis as two critics who act as a chorus (or “Grex” in Jonson’s terminology) to the action, on which they will comment throughout the performance. They are introduced to the audience in a 350-line prologic opening that dwarfs the play’s ostensible prologue, the reader of which is too frightened to play his part. Mitis and Cordatus are certainly not as intrusive as Nashe’s Toy, content instead to offer brief comments before and after random scenes; but in their extradramatic function—

punctuated by the long, discursive opening to the play—they nonetheless display a controlling impetus similar to that in *Summer's Last Will*. Taken together, Jonson's plays demonstrate the playwright's interest in manipulating the audience's expectations for convention (as we saw in Shakespeare), in regulating their interaction with the plays (similar to Nashe), and in shaping their opinion of the playwright (as in Lyly). Jonson, then, brings together many of the fundamental aspects of early modern prologues.

These three examples from Jonson, which were on the stage between 1598 and 1601, demonstrate the kind of theatrical authority on which I have focused herein; this is especially the case when we consider these plays' inter-dramatic exchanges. In his *Shakespeare and the Poet's War*, James Bednarz argues that *Poetaster*, *Cynthia's Revels*, and *Every Man Out* are implicated in the battle of words and wits that characterized some of the most recognizable drama from the turn of the century. The plays' involvement may also shed light on their prologic spaces' uncharacteristic length in the context of Jonson's oeuvre: they are the only three that expand the prologue and, given the nature of the Poet's War as a series of exercises in the interest of asserting authorial domain, the intrinsic authority of the prologic space would make it the natural site of Jonson's controlling self-assertion. After the Poet's War, however, Jonson's prologues are of a more conventional length, perhaps due to the fact that, in 1603, he begins to write masques and entertainments for the court and may have reserved his extra-dramatic impulse for these.

His more conventional prologues, however, are also a sign of the dramatist's discovery of refuge in print. His *Sejanus* (1604?, 1605), as Stephen Orgel rightly asserts,

is a “classic example” of this turn to print. After apparently meeting with an unkind audience,¹ the play was printed as a quarto with an appended note “To the Readers” that insists “this book, in all numbers, is not the same with that which was acted on the public stage, wherein a second pen had a good share” (37-38). Jonson goes on to explain that he has replaced his unnamed collaborator’s work with his own and in doing so, as Orgel points out, “Jonson here has succeeded in suppressing the theatrical production, and has replaced it with an independent, printed text, which he consistently refers to, moreover, not as a play but as a poem” (2). Jonson’s turn to print, seen here as early as 1605, is amplified by the publication of his magnum opus, *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson*, published in 1616. While the degree of Jonson’s collaboration with his printer, William Stansby, has been debated, its factuality, in general, has not.² In the context of this project, Jonson’s turn to print marks the beginning of a divergence from my examination of a specifically theatrical authority that is framed by, and constructed through, performance. For this reason, I have chosen to use Jonson as a capstone to this study instead of engaging his works more fully: an adequate analysis of Jonson’s prologic authority must be tied to his uses of paratexts—a term which applies to his *Workes* as it has not elsewhere in this study—and hence must become an account of a printed prologic sensibility.

This is not to say, of course, that printing plays no role in our understanding of prologics before Jonson. In Chapter IV I noted that *Romeo and Juliet*’s second quarto

¹ The dedication to Lord Aubigny in Jonson’s 1616 *Workes* indicates that it “suffered no less violence from our people here, than the subject of it did from the rage of the people of Rome” (9-10).

² Cf., Martin Butler, ed. *Re-presenting Ben Jonson (passim)*; Hereford and Simpson, *Ben Jonson* (1:64); Douglas A. Brooks, *From Playhouse to Printing House* (104-39).

announces on its title page that it is “Newly corrected, augmented, and amended,” presumably distinguishing it from the less “correct,” less complete first quarto. In comparing the two versions of the play’s prologues (or, perhaps, of the *plays*’ prologues) we can detect the trace evidence of an interpretive act; if the smaller version represents a “minimal” text that was trimmed in performance—or even if it represents a reconstruction of a performance—we see how at least one individual interpreted the play’s prologue as it relates to, and itself conveys, the themes of the play. Staying with Shakespeare’s works, another example of print history enriching our understanding of early modern prologics is the interesting relationship between *The Taming of A Shrew* and *The Taming of The Shrew*. The principle difference between these two plays is, in *A Shrew*, an expanded role for the extra-dramatic figure of Christopher Sly. In both plays Sly is part of a frame drama in which he is duped into believing that he is a Lord and that the play—either *A Shrew* or *The Shrew*—is being put on for his entertainment. In *A Shrew* a number of brief Sly scenes interrupt the action, and it would be interesting to tease out the implications of this expanded prologic space for our sense of early Shakespearean authorship. Whether or not the extra-dramatic scenes were excisions or late additions is intertwined with the dating of the play, and *The Shrew*, as it has come down to us sans Sly’s interventions, does not appear until Shakespeare’s First Folio is printed in 1623. This fruitfully complicates matters: how, for example, do John Heminges and Henry Condell, the editors of the volume, mediate our understanding of this prologue and its expansive potentiality? However, the intrusion of the Folio and its editors again asks us to reach into an era in which authorship and authority are

predicated upon the ideal notion of “True Originall Copies”—the claim on the Folio’s title page—and less about the performance of authority in the theatrical setting.

In addition to the dramatic culture’s heightened awareness of the printing house’s role in the creation of a competing authorial enterprise, and another reason that the end of the century recommends itself as a *terminus ad quem* for this project, we also begin to see a separation between prologic authority and the plays themselves. Even as Jonson begins to use the printed prologue as a means of self-authorization, prologues as well as epilogues are starting to be outsourced, if you will, to playwrights other than a play’s author. In his *Diary*, for example, Henslowe records a payment of ten shillings “unto Thomas deckers at the apoyntement of the company for A prologe & a epiloge for the playe of ponescioues pillet the 12 of Janewary 1601” (187). This sum is twice that later paid to Thomas Middleton “for a prologe & A epeloge for the playe of bacon for the corte” and to Henry Chettle “for a prologe & a epyloge for the corte” (207).³ As Bruster and Weimann astutely note “Henslowe’s willingness compensate playwrights at a greater per-word rate for prologues and epilogues [...] than for the scripts of plays themselves” (160.n7), thus demonstrating that, by the turn of the century, prologues (and epilogues) had become valuable commodities. Their value is compounded by the likely cachet attached to the playwrights who are here commissioned. Chettle was relatively modest in his play production, but Dekker and Middleton were prominent playwrights. Dekker, for example, had four plays on the London stage between 1599 and 1601, when he was paid by Henslowe for his contributions: *Old Fortunatus* (1599, 1600), *The*

³ It should be noted that payment to Middleton is not directly from Henslowe: his diary records that he “lent” five shillings to “Thomas downton the 14 of desemb[er] 1602.”

Shoemaker's Holiday (1599, 1600), *Patient Grissel* (1600, 1603), and *Satiromastix* (1601, 1602). Of these, *Shoemaker's Holiday* appears to have enjoyed some popularity, if its print legacy is any testament: the play saw five editions between 1600 and 1631. Middleton, on the other hand, saw eleven of his plays staged between 1603 and 1608, two of which—*The Honest Whore* (1604, 1604) and *The Bloody Banquet* (1608, 1639)—were collaborations with Dekker. The dramatic résumés of the Middleton and Dekker duo, then, provide a sense of the value that these dramatists lend to the plays for which they were commissioned to pen prologues.

The value attached to prologues by Henslowe certainly speaks to the form's emergence over the course of the 1590s, as does the form's availability for satire in Fletcher's *The Woman Hater*; but such prominence is a double-edged sword. Such evidence seems to indicate that the prologue, by 1601, is co-opted as an authorizing agent; when paired with the value associated with the period's prominent playwrights, the prologue cedes its intrinsic authority to the writer's name. Furthermore, the Folio of *Comedies and Tragedies Written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher* (1647) suggests that the practice of attaching non-authorial prologues to the plays may have been a prevalent practice. In a note from "The Stationer [Humphrey Moseley] to the Reader" the publisher is unprecedented in his insistence on authenticity, reiterating in various ways that "here is not any thing Spurious or impos'd" (A4r); however a "Postscript," which is buried between the bounty of commendatory verses and the volume's "Catalogue," admits otherwise: "We forgot to tell the *Reader*, that some *Prologues* and *Epilogues* (here inserted) were not written by the *Authours* of this

Volume; but made by others on the *Revivall* of severall *Playes*” (g2r). It is noteworthy, in the first instance, that this postscript exists, for Moseley could have easily let this information slip away unacknowledged. In its caveat to the claims to authenticity made in the publisher’s epistle, this admission testifies to a sense of guilt for attaching inauthentic prologues and epilogues to the plays in the folio, as if acknowledging the proper, authentic tie between the prologue and the author. At second glance, however, there is a clear sense that these “inauthentic” prologues and epilogues nevertheless remain in a volume with claims to perfection. We must assume, then, that the practice of attaching prologues to plays—certainly in revival performances but perhaps more widely as well—was something of a common practice.

This is not to say that the form loses all of its signifying powers—*The Woman Hater*, after all, opens with a prologue that is still negotiating the terms under which the audience will engage the play and the playwright—but the potential for detachment significantly complicates the prologic landscape as we progress into the Jacobean era. In this project I have argued that an examination of plays’ prologic spaces helps us to better understand dramatists’ relationships with the plays they write and the audiences for whom they write them. In my examination of the interlude tradition, for example, I have tried to demonstrate that the prologic space provides an authorial arena, imbued with an intrinsic authority, from which the interlude dramatists construct audiences that at once engage the mirthful performances in search of their social, moral, and spiritual values and, in doing so, validate dramatic representation at a time when theatrical performances were not merely disparaged but regulated by the writ of law and by

antitheatricalist prejudices. Additionally, my chapter on Shakespeare attempts to illustrate his investment in the form as an integral design feature of his plays and, therefore, an inseparable asset in his approach to the interpreting audience. In Shakespeare's prologues, though he uses them rarely, we can see the playwright engage his audience's prologic sensibility, challenging their expectations of the conventional prologic space, and thus enhancing their engagement with his plays and with the newly anointed entertainment impresario, the theater.

In addition to providing a clearer image of the dramatists' relationships to their plays and their audiences, prologic spaces also foster our understanding of the manner in which playwrights conceptualized and constructed their own relationship to nascent notions of authorship and authority. As I hope to have shown in my chapter on Thomas Nashe, the dramatist's relationship with the audience becomes increasingly fraught over the course of this study. Nashe, unlike the interlude dramatists, for example, does not draw upon the authorial position of his prologic space to assume the guise of the didact. In a manner similar to that of Shakespeare, Nashe relies upon the shared prologic sensibility and explodes the audience's expectation for an authorial prologic space into the prologic usurper Toy. In doing so, he models the supreme sense of authorial anxiety that is based on his fear that his works, dramatic and otherwise, are by their very nature beyond his control. Taking John Lyly as an earlier exemplar of a dramatist who constructs his relationship to authorship and authority, my third chapter has argued that Lyly uses intrinsic prologic authority as a pulpit of sorts, from which he is able to construct an authorial persona that is predicated upon advertising his rhetorical talents

and performing his humble service to the Queen. Although Lyly's apparent goal of obtaining the reversion of the Mastership of the Revels is never realized, the very fact that we critics often frame our discussions of him in terms of this perceived failure—in terms, that is, of his victimhood—speaks to his success in constructing a “John Lyly” whom we perceive to be a worthy courtier and a skilled rhetorician.

By way of conclusion I offer a brief discussion of another Jacobean play that presents fruitful avenues into the prologics of the years just beyond the scope of this study, even as it testifies to the survival—and manipulation—of the prologic conventions and predilections that I have been examining in it: Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607, 1613). The play begins, as you might imagine, with a prologue. A mere three lines into the Prologue's performance, however, he is interrupted by a grocer, George, who immediately rejects the prologue's play's title, *The London Merchant*, because it promises to jest at the expense of citizens like him. Over the course of the opening exchange between George and the Prologue, George's wife, Nell, comes to the stage and the couple insists that the players grant their apprentice boy, Ralph, a part in their play. The very title of Beaumont's play is the result of an impromptu negotiation between the George—who suggests *The Grocer's Honour* as a title—and the Prologue who, jestingly, offers *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, much to Nell's delight. The rest of the play consists of the citizens directing Ralph's interjected scenes in the interest of creating the slapdash quest narrative that their new title promises.

Very clearly, then, the play dramatizes—and, one would think, exaggerates—the kind of audience interaction that we have seen Shakespeare embrace and Nashe loathe. Just as the prologue to Fletcher’s *Woman Hater* demonstrates the prologue’s availability for satire, in *Knight of the Burning Pestle* we see that the audience’s involvement—or perhaps intrusion—in plays must have been so commonplace as to warrant treatment in a play by one of the period’s foremost playwrights. The satire, however, was apparently not well-received on the stage. The dedicatory epistle to the play’s quarto, published six years after the initial performance, compares the initial play to an “unfortunate child:”

who in eight daies (as lately I have learned) was begot and borne soone after, was by his parents (perhaps because hee was so unlike his brethren) exposed to the wide world, who for want of judgement, or not understanding the privy marke of Ironie about it (which shewed it was no of-spring of any vulgar braine) utterly rejected it. (A2r)

The excuses here are myriad, but regardless of the reason that the play met with a dissatisfied audience—because it was hastily produced, because it was unfamiliar to them, because they lacked judgment, or because they failed to perceive the “Ironie about it”—the result is that they “utterly rejected it.” The play’s initial rejection is amplified by the perceived need for an elaborate apology six years after its performance; and both testify to the audience’s increased intervention in the dramatic endeavor that we see developing over the course of the 1590s in the prologic spaces of Shakespeare and Nashe.

Given the tenor of the play’s apologetic dedication in 1613 it might be understandable that another twenty-two years elapse before the play is published again; in the 1635 quarto there is no dedication, only a note “To the Reader of This Comedy”

and an appended prologue. What is interesting about both of these paratexts is that they are John Lyly's.⁴ The note to the reader begins:

Gentlemen, the World is so nice in these our times, that for Apparrell there is no fashion; for Musicke which is a rare Art (though now slighted) no Instrument; for Diet, none but French Kickshoes that are delicate; and for Playes, no invention but that which now runneth an invective way, touching some particular person, or else it is contemned before it is thoroughly understood. (A3r)⁵

This passage is a near-quotation of Lyly's Paul's prologue to *Midas*, which begins, "Gentlemen, so nice is the world, that for apparel there is no fashion, for Musicke no instrument, for diet no delicate, for playes no invention, but breedeth sacietie before noone, and contempt before night" (1.0.1-4). To a certain extent the interpolations in the later version merely bring the Lylian passage up to date: the belittling of rare music, the reference to French "kickshoes," and the suggestion that invective now rules the stage are all distinct attempts to situate the passage in a different context. In spite of these updates, however, it is clear that the publisher, possibly John Spencer, or the printer, Nicholas Okes,⁶ have not arbitrarily chosen this passage from Lyly. We will recall that the *Midas* prologue is that in which the prologic voice laments the fact that "the whole worlde is become an Hodge-podge" (1.0.19-20) and, bearing out the metaphor for cultural taste, "what heretofore hath beene served in severall dishes for a feaste, is now minced in a charger for a Gallimaufry" (1.0.17-19). The impression in both contexts is that the world has turned fickle, much to the detriment of good drama.

⁴ Although they are not acknowledged as such.

⁵ Cf. Lyly: "Gentlemen, so nice is the world, that for apparel there is no fashion, for Musicke no instrument, for diet no delicate, for playes no invention, but breedeth sacietie before noone, and contempt before night."

⁶ The title page indicates that the book was "printed by N. O. for J. S."; in their *DEEP* entry for the play, Lesser and Farmer speculate that the latter is Spencer, and are less speculative that the former is Okes.

The sentiment continues in the prologue, this being an almost verbatim rendition of Lyly's Blackfriars prologue to *Sapho and Phao*. Lyly's primary defense for his play—and, thus, the primary defense of the 1635 *Knight of the Burning Pestle*—is that

Our intent was at this time to move inward delight, not outward lightnesse, and to breede (if it might bee) soft smiling, not loude laughing: knowing it to the wise to be as great pleasure to heare counsel mixed with witte, as to the foolishe to have sport mingled with rudeness" (1.0.7-11).

In its original context this passage adequately describes a Lylian project and, as is often characteristic of the playwright, draws upon the precedent of the interludes' mixture of mirth and matter to appeal to the auditor's higher senses of apprehension. In its new context, however, the prologue seems tone deaf—an inappropriate opening for a play that lampoons the upstart London merchant class for the "outward lightness" and "loude laughing" of the private Blackfriars playhouse. However, we can begin to understand the force behind the appropriation as the *Knight of the Burning Pestle* prologue nears its end and departs from the Lylian version to defend "the Authors intention." Lyly's "we have endeavored to be as farre from unseemely speeches [...] as wee hope you will be from unkinde reportes to make our cheekes blush" (1.0.14-17) becomes "[...]as we hope you will be free from unkinde reports, *or mistaking the Authors intention, (who never aymed at any one particular in this Play,)* to make our cheekes blush" (A4r, emphasis added). The use of Lyly's prologue is in the interest of recontextualizing this printing of a play that seems to have been "misunderstood" throughout its life. Moreover, the typical Lylian humility is reassigned to Beaumont, reanimating the dramatist and supplying him—or rather, his proxy, the publisher—with an opportunity to reframe himself and his *Knight of the Burning Pestle* vis-à-vis a new audience. Lyly becomes the unassuming

auctor, and the appropriation of his prologue revivifies the connections between plays and prologues, and authors and audiences, just as it breathes new life into the rhetorically constructed Lylian authorial persona. The Lylian past, one might say, is *Knight of the Burning Pestle's* prologue.

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