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R. A. FOAKES

## Playhouses and players

WHEN we look back at a distant historical period, it is easy to succumb to two temptations; the first is to see a sudden, sharp break with the past taking place at some date such as the coming to the throne of Elizabeth I (1558), or James I (1603), as though a transformation in all aspects of society happened in those instants. The second is to telescope the passage of decades of change into a single, homogenized period like ‘the age of Elizabeth’, as though forty-five years could be focused in a single, unchanging image. In our own lives we are continually alert to shifts and changes that make what happened or was in vogue ten years, five years, or even one year ago seem curiously old-fashioned and different now. Perhaps it has always been so, even when change was slower technologically. The period from 1558 to the end of the reign of Charles I saw the passage of eighty-four years, during which the theatre was transformed, and the drama startlingly expanded and diversified. It is perhaps unfortunate that the great standard works on the theatres and drama in this period should be entitled *The Elizabethan Stage* and *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*.<sup>1</sup> Yet any account of the period needs to begin with the recognition that there were many different stages as playhouses became more sophisticated, and that perhaps the only constant feature of the theatres up to 1642 was that all parts were normally played by men and boys; the professional companies in London had no actresses in them until after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The following account of playhouses and players in this period is especially concerned to illustrate the changes and developments that took place in the theatres during the passage of nearly a century. It is divided into four sections: the first deals with the growth of the ‘public’ or arena theatres; the second is concerned with the earlier ‘private’ or indoor playhouses; the third describes the later private theatres after 1615, and their relation to the surviving arena stages; and the last focuses on the companies that played in the various theatres, and the business of acting.

<sup>1</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*; Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*.

### The arena theatres

By the time Queen Elizabeth came to the throne a tradition of playing, both by adult groups of players and by companies of boys, was well established. A number of adult groups toured the major towns of England giving performances, without having any regular schedule or theatre buildings in which to play. A longstanding tradition of including the acting of plays in a humanist education for grammar-school boys led to boys' companies providing a major part of the entertainment at court during the Christmas season, and at Shrovetide. Plays had been staged at court for festive occasions since the reign of Henry VII, and Queen Elizabeth maintained the custom. During the early years of her reign up to 1576, performances at court by boys outnumbered those by adult groups. After 1576 professional companies of adult players became far more important, and began to establish their own permanent playhouses in London. I shall deal with these playhouses first.

In the early years of Elizabeth's reign groups of players performed where they could, occasionally indoors in halls to provide entertainment at court or in great houses, but more frequently in public in the square or rectangular yards of a number of inns in the city of London, the galleries round the yards being used by spectators. The companies were all licensed by the patronage of some great lord to travel and perform, for, if unlicensed, they were, according to a statute of 1598, technically deemed 'Rogues Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars'.<sup>2</sup> The civic authorities of the city of London generally showed hostility to players, whom they saw as a nuisance, promoting crowds and disorder, and distracting people, especially apprentices, from their proper occupations, as well as from divine service on Sundays. Following a prohibition of 1559, which does not seem to have had much effect, the Common Council of London in December 1574 banned performances in taverns in the city unless innkeepers were licensed and the plays first subjected to strict supervision and censorship.<sup>3</sup>

We do not know how effective such prohibitions were, for they did not altogether stop playing at the Bull in Bishopsgate, or at the Bell in Gracechurch Street, where performances continued for another decade or more; however, they may have stimulated entrepreneurs to borrow money and build the first professional playhouses outside the jurisdiction of the city authorities. The earliest was the Red Lion, erected east of London in Stepney in 1567 by John Brayne, brother-in-law of James Burbage, who, with Brayne, built the Theatre in 1576. Not much is known about the Red Lion, except that it had

<sup>2</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, iv.324.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.273–6; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 73–7.

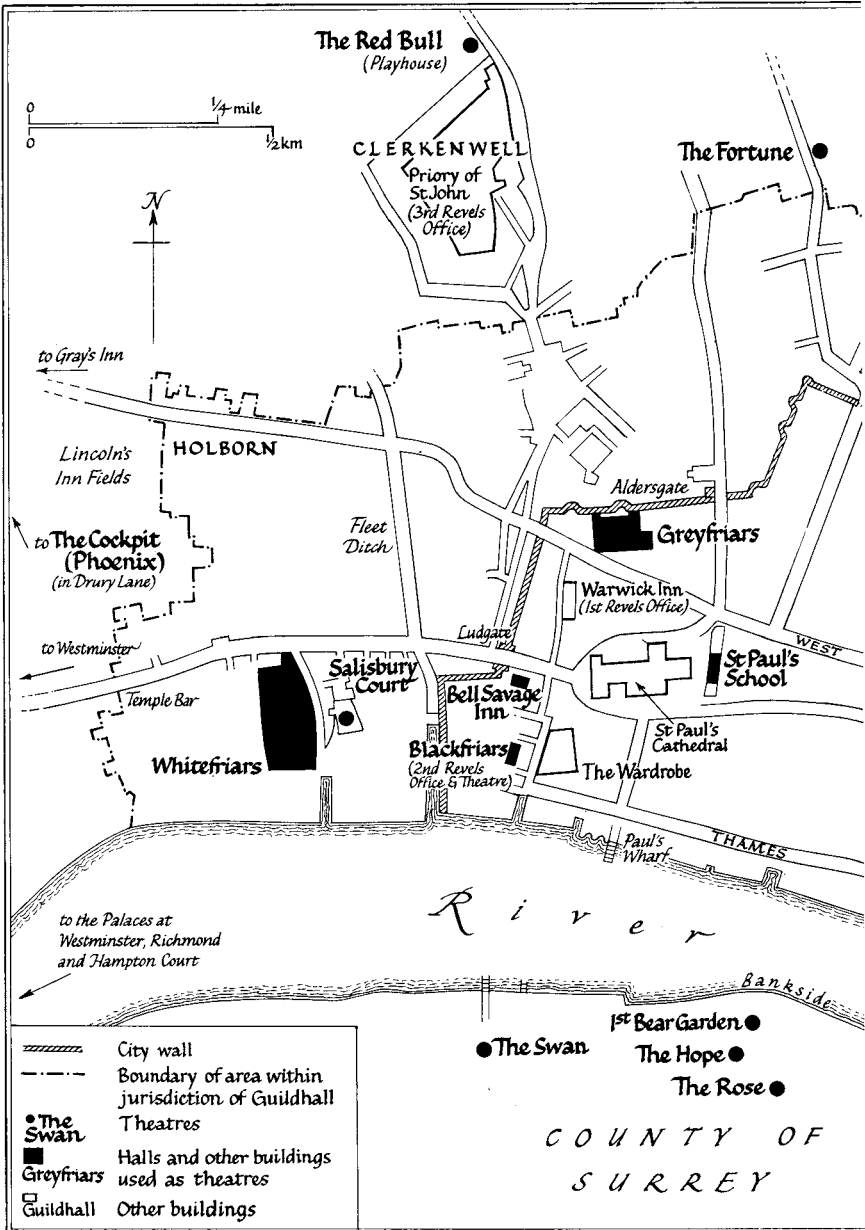
a large stage, surrounded by galleries, and a 'turret' thirty feet high, with a floor made seven feet below the top.<sup>4</sup> James Burbage was father of the actor, Richard Burbage, who later played leading roles in many of Shakespeare's plays. The Theatre and the Curtain (built in 1577) were located to the north of the city limits (see pp. 4–5). Within a few years a fourth playhouse was built in Newington, well to the south of the Thames, and then a fifth with the erection of the Rose on Bankside in 1587. By this date it seems that performances were being offered daily, if the account of a German visitor to London in 1585 can be trusted.<sup>5</sup> The new theatres appeared sumptuous to visitors and to puritan critics of the stage, and they were evidently much more luxurious than the inn-yards which they superseded.

The city's attempt to restrain playing in inn-yards thus contributed to the development of fully professional companies playing regularly on most days, except in Lent, or in times of plague, in purpose-built theatres. The immediate success of the new theatres can be measured to some extent by the anxieties they provoked; indeed, by 1583, Philip Stubbes, disclaiming any hostility to theatres and plays in general, nevertheless voiced what had already become a regular complaint, that people flocked to 'Theatres and curtains' when 'the church of God shall be bare and empty'.<sup>6</sup> Stubbes's reference to the Theatre and the Curtain shows that the current centre of theatrical activity was Shoreditch, a north-east suburb. The playhouses here were a long way from the heart of the old city of London, which lay close to the River Thames. There had been arenas for bull- and bear-baiting south of the Thames on Bankside for many years, and the Beargarden there remained in business until 1613. So when the Rose was also built on Bankside in 1587, there were plenty of 'watermen' to ferry spectators over the river, and it may have been easier to cross the river by boat or by London Bridge than to ride or walk out to the north. With the erection of the Swan on Bankside in 1595, this area became a major focus of theatrical activity. The river formed the southern boundary here of the city limits, so that the Bankside stages too were beyond the control of the city council.

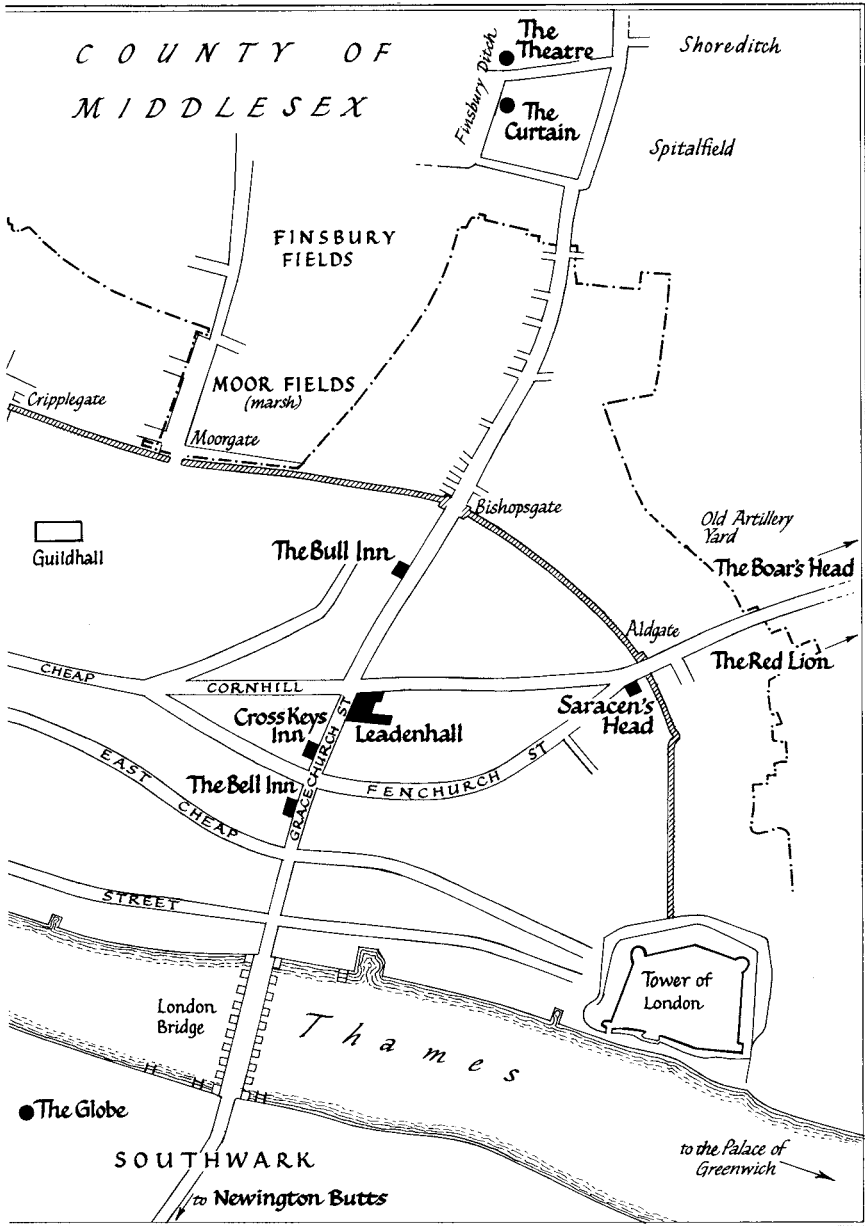
A Flemish visitor to London in 1596 described the Swan as the largest and most splendid of the London theatres. In 1592, and again in 1595, the owner of the Rose, Philip Henslowe, spent substantial sums on repairing, improving, and extending his theatre (see p. 13). It is probable that the wooden Theatre and Curtain were in disrepair and obsolescent by this time, after nearly twenty years of use. Burbage had taken a lease on the site of the Theatre for twenty-one years in 1576, and had difficulty in his attempts to

<sup>4</sup> See Janet Loengard, 'An Elizabethan lawsuit: John Brayne, his carpenter, and the building of the Red Lion theatre', *SQ* 34 (1983), 298–310; Ingram, *The Business of Playing*, pp. 92–115.

<sup>5</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.358.      <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.223.



1 Map showing principal public and private theatres, other locations important to theatrical regulation and performance, and some main topographical features of London, c. 1560-1640

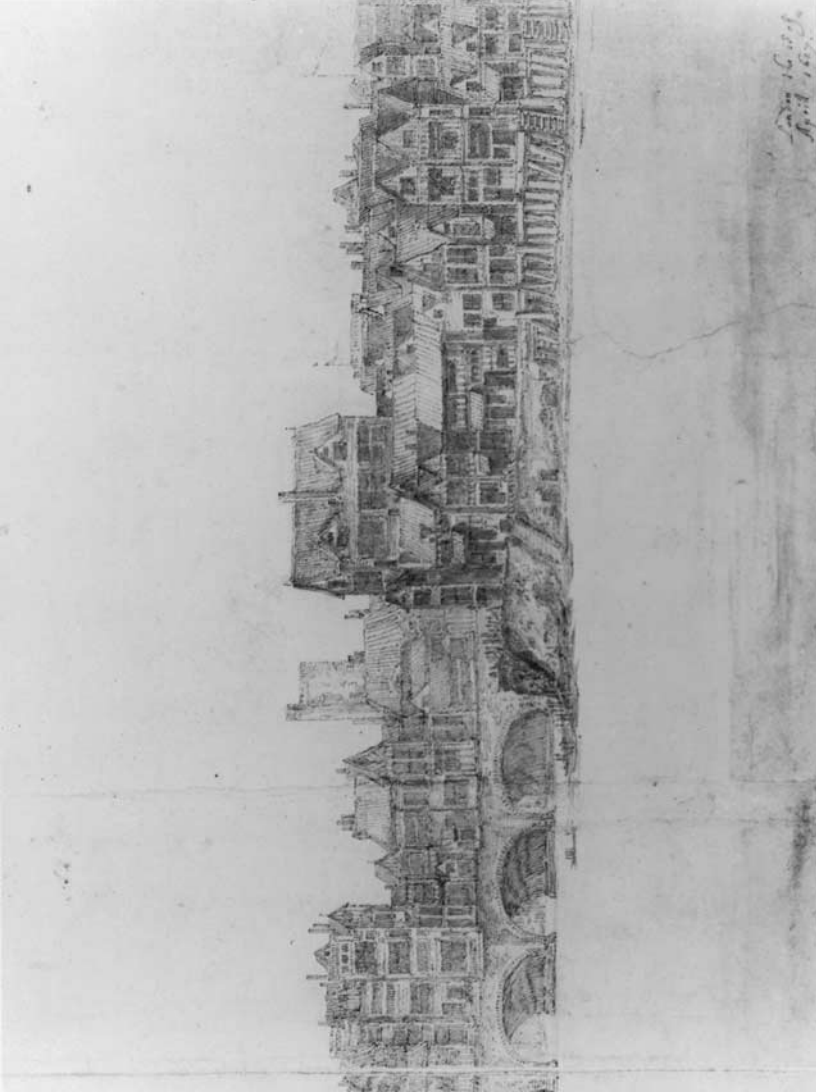


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renew it. Foreseeing the need to make a move, in 1596 Burbage acquired space in the precinct of the old Blackfriars monastery, which, although it lay within the city walls (see pp. 4–5), retained certain privileges as a ‘liberty’ exempt from city control: but Burbage’s idea of turning his newly acquired property into a ‘common playhouse’ was frustrated by the local inhabitants, who petitioned the Privy Council to prevent him. Burbage’s way out was to take a lease on a site on Bankside, dismantle the Theatre, and use those timbers that could be salvaged in the construction there of a new playhouse, the Globe, which was in operation by 1599. In the summer of 1597, the performance at the Swan of a play by Thomas Nashe, *The Isle of Dogs* (now lost), containing lewd and seditious matters, led to the arrest of three men, including Ben Jonson, who had been involved in the production, and provoked the Privy Council to order a ‘restraint’ prohibiting the performance of plays within three miles of the city.<sup>7</sup> A more serious effect of the affair of *The Isle of Dogs* was that Francis Langley, the owner of the Swan, could not obtain a licence to stage plays there when the restraint was lifted in the autumn; after this time the Swan never seems to have been able to attract and retain a regular company of players, although it continued to be used for other kinds of shows and entertainments.

For a brief period in 1599 the two most important companies of players operated on Bankside, where the Rose and the Globe drew audiences across the river. The most settled and prosperous companies were the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, who played at the Globe, and the Lord Admiral’s Men, who played at the Rose. The increased competition brought by the presence of the new Globe, the dilapidation of the Rose, now an ageing playhouse, and the fact that his lease was due to expire in 1605, drove Philip Henslowe to seek a replacement. In 1600 he opened his new theatre, the Fortune, in a northern suburb, beyond Cripplegate (see pp. 4–5) but well to the west of the Shoreditch area where the old Theatre had stood, and where the Curtain was still operating in spite of the Privy Council order for its dismantling. The city was spreading west and north, and the Fortune stood within convenient walking distance for a growing population. A little earlier Robert Browne had established a company at the Boar’s Head, in Whitechapel, outside the eastern limits of the city, where an inn was converted into a theatre in 1599, with a stage in the inn-yard, and galleries along each side of the rectangular yard. Here a strong company, formed by the amalgamation of the Earl of Worcester’s Men and Lord Oxford’s Men, was playing in 1602. Browne died

<sup>7</sup> R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, *Henslowe’s Diary*, p. 240; but see also Ingram, *A London Life in the Brazen Age: Francis Langley 1548–1602* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 167–96 and Gurr, *Companies*, pp. 107–9.



2 Claude de Jongh's sketch of London Bridge, 1627; detail showing the roof-lines and flags of the Hope or Beargarden and the Globe

of the plague in 1603, and was succeeded by Thomas Greene, but perhaps the venture was never a success; no plays can certainly be identified with this theatre, and the company moved in 1605 to a new playhouse, the Red Bull, in the same area as the Fortune, but a little further north-west, in Clerkenwell (see p. 4). The Red Bull had been an inn too, but it is always referred to as a playhouse or theatre after 1605, and perhaps what took place here was not a conversion, in the manner of the Boar's Head,<sup>8</sup> but rather a virtual reconstruction.

The Red Bull was the last arena theatre to be built, apart from the Hope. The Hope was designed as a dual-purpose place of entertainment, doubling as a bear-baiting arena and a theatre, and it replaced the old Beargarden on Bankside, torn down in 1613. Of the older theatres, that furthest south, at Newington Butts, seems to have fallen into disuse by 1595; the Theatre was dismantled in 1598, and the Rose demolished probably by 1606. After its brief period of success from about 1595 to 1597, the Swan, located furthest west of the Bankside theatres, and less accessible than the others from London Bridge, ceased to be in regular use as a theatre; although performances were revived there between 1611 and 1615, it seems thereafter to have been used only for 'feats of activity' (see below, pp. 12–13), and had fallen into decay by 1632. The Hope opened with some éclat in the autumn of 1614, when Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* was presented there, but from about 1617 onwards it functioned mainly as a house for the baiting of bears and bulls, and for the exhibition of exotic animals. The history of the Curtain is obscure after 1607, apart from a few years between 1621 and 1625, when it was in use as a playhouse, but, as far as is known, no plays were staged there after 1625.

The remaining open-air theatres, the Globe (burned down in 1613 and rebuilt), the Fortune (burned down in 1621 and rebuilt), and the Red Bull, all continued in operation until Parliament closed the theatres in 1642. Throughout the period from 1576 to 1642, substantial audiences were drawn to these large theatres. As far as we know, each of them had a stage projecting into an arena partly open to the skies, and surrounded by three tiers of galleries. According to Thomas Platter, a Swiss visitor who saw *Julius Caesar* performed at the Globe in September 1599, the spectator paid one penny to stand in the arena, another penny to sit in a gallery, and a penny more 'to sit on a cushion in the most comfortable place of all, where he not only sees everything well, but can also be seen'.<sup>9</sup> Prices of admission increased in later

<sup>8</sup> As Wickham thinks, *Early English Stages*, II.2.108.

<sup>9</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.365; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 412–13.



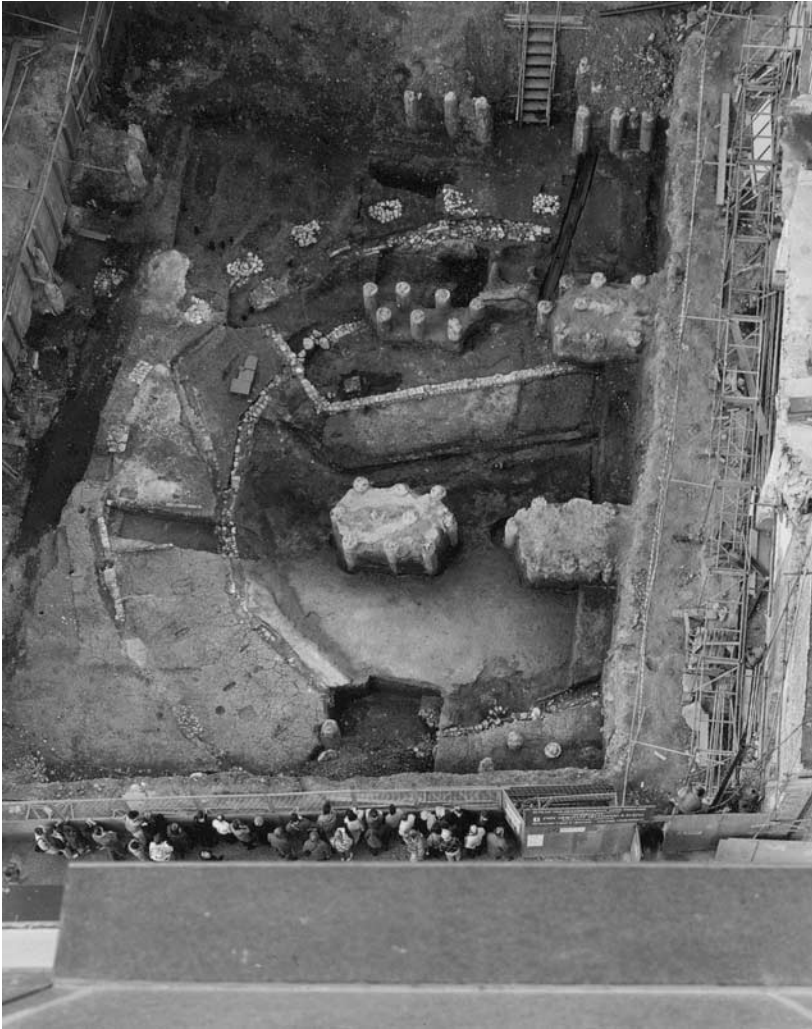
years, and the theatres were made more comfortable: the surviving contract for the Fortune called for 'gentlemen's rooms' and 'twopenny rooms' to be plastered.<sup>10</sup> These rooms were either in the gallery over the rear of the stage, or in sections of the main galleries – perhaps those sections closest to the stage were partitioned off to make 'twopenny rooms'. Wherever these rooms were (see below, p. 17), the evidence shows that the playhouses provided a hierarchy of accommodations in the expectation that the audience would be socially and economically diversified. There are a number of instances of dramatists joking with the 'understanding gentlemen o'the ground' (Ben Jonson, Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*), or sneering at them, as in Hamlet's snobbishly caustic comments on the 'groundlings' as capable only of 'inexplicable dumb-shows and noise'. It seems that arena spectators might also throw eggs or apples at players if they disliked the entertainment (Prologue to *The Hog hath Lost his Pearl*, 1613). However uneducated, and however much they may have preferred fights, noise, and clowning to serious drama, the groundlings remained an important part of the audience, and the arena theatres continued to cater to them.<sup>11</sup>

These playhouses were all similar in their basic conception, which is to say that all were relatively large arena theatres, accommodating probably between 2,000 and upwards of 3,000 spectators. Many of the detailed arrangements remain a matter of speculation, however, and not only did these theatres differ from one another in important ways, but over the years it seems that many structural changes were introduced. The early theatres were built of wood, probably, as the Fortune contract specifies, on piles and foundations of brick. Flint may have been used for the Swan, but the evidence is conflicting; and, like the others, this theatre appeared round, so that Johannes De Witt, visiting London in 1596, could describe all four theatres he saw (Theatre, Curtain, Rose, Swan) as 'amphiteatra'.<sup>12</sup> We now know that the Rose was multi-sided (see pp. 10–11), and no doubt the other wood-framed theatres were similarly constructed. This would explain why, on some maps (none of them authoritative), they are represented as polygonal, usually hexagonal or octagonal. Current research suggests that the playhouses had many more sides: the Rose, with a diameter of about 74 feet, had fourteen, and the much larger Globe, thought to have had a diameter of about 100 feet, may have had twenty or twenty-four.<sup>13</sup> The design of the theatres can be related to the circular arenas for bear- and bull-baiting which

<sup>10</sup> *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 308.    <sup>11</sup> Gurr, *Playgoing*, pp. 73–80.

<sup>12</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.362.

<sup>13</sup> John Orrell, *The Quest for Shakespeare's Globe* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 160–1, and see Julian Bowsher, *The Rose Theatre: An Archaeological Discovery* (London, 1998).



3 The Rose theatre excavation

The illustration shows the remains of the Rose theatre exposed when excavation halted in May 1989. Much of the ground-plan of the playhouse can be seen, although parts of it to the east and south remain unexcavated, and some other features have been obliterated by the sets of piles driven through for a building put up in the 1950s. The Rose was built for Philip Henslowe in 1587 as a slightly irregular polygonal building. To the north-west only eight pile-caps survive to show the line of the original outer wall, but enough of the chalk and stone footings of the outer and inner walls of the theatre have been exposed to show that it had fourteen sides or bays. The straight sections of the outer wall measure between 15 feet and 16 feet 6 inches, those of the inner wall just over 11 feet, and the depth of each bay, i.e., the distance between the outer and inner walls, was 10 feet 6 inches. The playhouse had an external diameter of about 74 feet, was smaller than the Fortune, built to replace it in 1600 (4,500 square feet ground area,

had stood on Bankside for decades,<sup>14</sup> but they appeared to some visitors to London to resemble the structure of ancient Roman amphitheatres.<sup>15</sup>

Only one drawing survives of the interior of an arena playhouse, a copy by Aernout van Buchell of a sketch of the Swan theatre made in 1596 by Johannes De Witt (see p. 14). This shows the large projecting rectangular stage, with a canopy over it supported by two columns. At the rear of the stage is the wall of the tiring-house, with two large, round-arched rustic doors in it providing entrances on to the stage. Above this wall is a gallery partitioned into six bays. The drawing also clumsily incorporates a hut apparently above and behind the canopy over the stage, with a trumpeter blowing as if to announce a performance, and a flag flying, with the house emblem on it.

<sup>14</sup> Foakes, *Illustrations*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>15</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.362, 366; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 441.

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← excluding the galleries, as against 6,400 square feet), and considerably smaller than the Globe, if that was as large as many now think (about 7,800 square feet ground area).

The open-air arena inside the inner walls was covered with impervious mortar, most of which is still in place. The northern section is confusing because the theatre was extended and partly rebuilt at some point, probably in 1592, when Henslowe recorded large expenses for work that included breaking up, buying bricks and chalk, putting in rafters, bricklaying, thatching, plastering, painting the stage, and setting up a penthouse shed at the tiring-house door (*Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 9–13). The extension involved erecting a new stage, and enlarged the capacity of the arena and galleries. The earlier stage is marked by a plinth running roughly east-west, and it tapered towards the front, where it was 24 feet 9 inches wide; at the rear it measured 37 feet 6 inches wide, and it had a maximum depth of 15 feet 6 inches. It was thus smaller than the stage at the Fortune, which the contract specified could be 43 feet wide and extend to the middle of the yard. The rear wall seems to have been the inner frame of the polygon, so that the stage was very different from the rectangular one depicted by De Witt at the Swan, with its straight rear screen or *frons scenae* (see p. 14).

North of the outline of the earlier stage can be seen the clunch or soft stone footings of a second stage of a similar shape, built when the theatre was extended. The front of it is set back 6 feet 6 inches from the earlier stage. A base, presumably for a column, has been found in the south-west corner of the later stage, and may be evidence of support for a cover over the stage. If so, the boards of the platform would need to have extended beyond the perimeter marked by the footings to allow an actor to pass in front of it. Both stages were oriented roughly south, so that they would have the even light of shade when plays were performed during the afternoon. An erosion trench visible in the mortar of the arena indicates where water fell from the thatched roof above the galleries. On the west side two parallel partition walls may mark a passage for access to the arena, but the main entrance may have been on the south side, opposite centre-stage. No evidence has yet been found of the tiring-house, which was probably located in the bays behind the stage.

Further analysis will no doubt reveal more details (see Julian Bowsher, *The Rose Theatre: An Archaeological Discovery* (London, 1998), pp. 28–57), but the basic information outlined here is already startling in many ways. The Rose was different from the Swan and the Globe, and its smaller auditorium requires us to think of a capacity of the order of 2,000 spectators rather than 3,000 or more as at the Globe. The information is thus of great importance, for it is the first reliable evidence we have about the Elizabethan arena theatres, and it challenges some assumptions that have long been taken for granted.

No spectators are shown in the galleries or the arena, and the only figures portrayed are three actors on stage and one or two persons in each bay of the gallery at the rear of the stage. The figures on stage and the bench drawn there could be an artist's invention to decorate that otherwise blank space, or they may have been recollected from some performance. The figures in the gallery may indicate gentlemen in the 'gentlemen's rooms', or, again, may be decorative. The stage itself seems to float above two openings where curtains have been partly drawn, but these could also be interpreted as columns supporting the stage. The drawing does not show a performance taking place; some have thought it depicts a rehearsal, but this is improbable, for there would be other persons at a rehearsal, the book-holder or prompter, other members of the company, and those who managed or directed productions. The details of the drawing are difficult to interpret, and of uncertain reliability, and I think the sketch needs to be treated with scepticism, not accepted 'at its face value',<sup>16</sup> or as 'generally reliable'.<sup>17</sup>

The Swan (1595) was the first of the second generation of purpose-built theatres, and may well have been the largest and most splendid of the playhouses when it was erected, as De Witt observed,<sup>18</sup> but it was probably different from the Globe and Fortune in important respects. The contract for the Fortune shows that it imitated features of the Globe,<sup>19</sup> but when Philip Henslowe went on to erect the Hope in 1613–14 as a replacement for the Beorgarden, the contract he drew up for it specifically calls for a design similar to that of the Swan.<sup>20</sup> The explanation for this is probably that the Swan itself was a dual-purpose playhouse and game-house,<sup>21</sup> with a removable stage, which would have made possible the use of the entire arena for the 'feats of activity' one Peter Bromville was licensed to put on there in 1600. There is no evidence that the Swan was used for animal-baiting, but there is little evidence, either, that it was used for plays between 1597 and 1611. In February 1602 a man was accidentally killed while taking part in a fencing match held there.<sup>22</sup> A spectacular entertainment was advertised as taking place there in November 1602 (see below, p. 13), but this proved to be a hoax. The Swan, then, was little used after 1597; only one play (Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, 1613; printed 1630) is

<sup>16</sup> Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II.1.204.

<sup>17</sup> Hosley, 'Playhouses' in *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. III (1576–1613) (London, 1975), p. 136.

<sup>18</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.362; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 441.

<sup>19</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.437; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 535.

<sup>20</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.466–7; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 598.

<sup>21</sup> Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II.2.68–9.

<sup>22</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.413; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 448.

certainly known to have been acted there, and the Hope, modelled on it, seems pretty well to have put it out of business. It is reasonable to infer that the Swan was more like the Hope than the other theatres on Bankside. The Hope itself proved to be more successful as a game-house than as a playhouse.

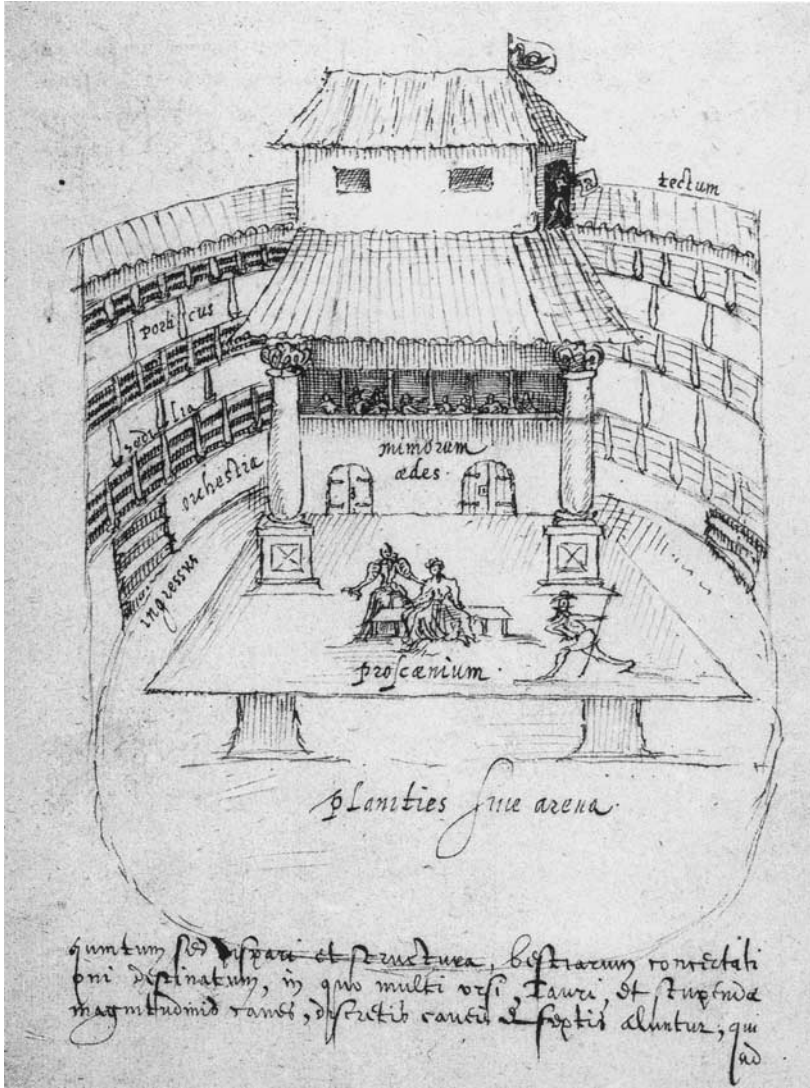
The simpler facilities of the dual-purpose houses may have made them less and less attractive as theatres during a period when the playhouses were gradually becoming more elaborate and comfortable. Accommodation in the early playhouses seems to have been Spartan for most spectators, and probably for actors too. Henslowe plastered and put ceilings into the gentlemen's rooms at the Rose in 1592, and improved the tiring-house facilities by adding a penthouse. In 1595, he had a 'throne' made in the 'heavens',<sup>23</sup> presumably a machine to make it possible to lower a throne, and perhaps other properties, on to the stage; he also made substantial renovations at this time. The De Witt drawing of the Swan has perpetuated the idea of the Elizabethan theatres as having a bare stage and minimal facilities, but other evidence suggests rather that their accommodation and equipment were continually being improved. They were a tourist attraction for foreign visitors, who, like the puritan critics of the stage, frequently remarked on the magnificence of the buildings. So De Witt himself noted the beauty (*'pulchritudinis'*) of the four theatres in 1596, and Thomas Platter in 1599 observed that the players were 'most expensively and elegantly apparelled'.<sup>24</sup> In November 1602 Richard Vennar lured a large audience to the Swan on a Saturday by advertising an elaborate entertainment called 'England's Joy'; but, according to a letter written by John Chamberlain, 'the common people, when they saw themselves deluded, revenged themselves upon the hangings, curtains, chairs, stools, walls, and whatsoever came in their way'.<sup>25</sup> Apparently the 'great store of good company, and many noblemen' present did not take part in this riot. The curtains and hangings referred to by Chamberlain are not hinted at in De Witt's drawing.

The new Swan struck De Witt as the most splendid of the London theatres in 1596, apparently because it was more richly furnished and decorated than the earlier theatres. The Globe (1599) and Fortune (1600) were no doubt even more elaborate. At the Fortune the main posts of the frame of the theatre and the stage were to be wrought 'pilasterwise', with carved proportions called 'Satyrs' to be placed on the top of each;<sup>26</sup> in other words, the columns of the main frame and stage were to be carved so as to represent the appearance of

<sup>23</sup> *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 7.      <sup>24</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.362, 365.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, III.501; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 447.

<sup>26</sup> *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 308; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 535.






4 Johannes de Witt's sketch of the Swan theatre about 1596, as copied by Aernout van Buchell; see p. 13

one of the classical orders, and decorated with figures, half-man, half-goat, drawn from classical mythology. So not only were the stage posts classical in appearance (perhaps like the Corinthian columns supporting the canopy in the De Witt drawing), but also the main posts of the entire frame. These features could explain why foreign visitors like Thomas Platter thought of the Bankside playhouse they visited as constructed in the style of an ancient

**THE PLOT OF THE PLAY, CALLED  
ENGLANDS JOY.**

To be Playd at the Swan this 6. of Nouember. 1602.



1<sup>ST</sup>, there is induc'd by shew and in Action, the ciuill warres of England from *Edward* the third, to the end of *Queene Maries* raigne, with the ouerthrow of *Vispation*.

2<sup>d</sup> Secondly then the entrance of *Englands Joy* by the Coronation of our Soueraigne Lady *Elsabeth*, her Throne attended with peace, Plenty, and ciuill Policy: A sacred Prelate standing at her right hand, betokening the Serenity of the Gospell: At her left hand Iustice: And at her feet Warre, with a Scarlet Roabe of peace vpon his Armour: A wreath of Bayes about his temples, and a branch of Palme in his hand.

3<sup>d</sup> Thirdly is dragd in three Furies, presenting *Dissention*, *Famine*, and *Bloudshed*, which are throwne downe into hell.

4<sup>th</sup> Fourthly is exprest vnder the person of a Tyrant, the enuy of *Spyne*, who to shew his cruelty causeth his Souldiers dragge in a beautifull Lady, whome they mangle and wound, tearing her garments and Jewels from off her: And so leane her blondy, with her hayre about her shoulders, lying vpon the ground. To her come certaine Gentlemen, who seeing her pitious dispoylment, turne to the Throne of England, from whence one defendeth, taketh vp the Lady, wipeth her eyes, bindeth vp her woundes, glueth her treasure, and bringeth forth a band of Souldiers, who amend her forth: This Lady presenteth *Belgia*.


5<sup>th</sup> Fifthly, the Tyrant more enraged, taketh counsell, sends forth letters, priuie Spies, and secret vnderminers, taking their othes, and giuing them bagges of treasure. These signifie *Lepus*, and certaine Iesuites, who afterward, when the Tyrant lookes for an answer from them, are shewed to him in a glasse with halters about their neckes, which makes him mad with fury.

6<sup>th</sup> Sixtly, the Tyrant seeing all secret meanes to fayle him, intendeth open violence and inuasion by the hand of Warre, whereupon is set forth the battle at Sea in 88. with *Englands* victory.

7<sup>th</sup> Seuenthly, hee comploteth with the Irish rebelles, wherein is layd open the base ingratitude of *Tyrone*, the landing there of *Don Iohn de Aquila*, and their dissipation by the wisedome and valour of the Lord *Mountney*.

8<sup>th</sup> Eightly, a great triumph is made with fighting of twelue Gentlemen at Barriers, and sundrie rewards sent from the Throne of England, to all sortes of well deseruers.

9<sup>th</sup> Lastly, the Nine Worthies, with seuerall Coronets, present themselves before the Throne, which are put backe by certaine in the habite of Angels, who set vpon the Ladies head, which represents her Maiesie, an Imperiall Crowne, garnished with the *Sunne*, *Moon*, and *Starres*: And so with Musicke both with voyce and Instruments shee is taken vp into Heauen, when presently appeares, a Throne of blessed soules, and beneath vnder the Stage set forth with strange fire-works, diuers blacke and damned Soules, wonderfully discribed in their seuerall torments.



5 The playbill for Richard Vennar's hoax entertainment, *England's Joy*, 1602; see p. 13

Roman amphitheatre. The internal façade of the stage and the whole theatre at the Fortune, built in emulation of the Globe, must have been imposing. The 'cover' over the stage was perhaps initially a simple canopy, designed to protect actors, properties, and hangings from the worst of the weather; it was painted on the underside with a representation of the sun, moon, stars, and zodiac, and known as 'the heavens'. The Swan seems to have had such a canopy, and a removable stage; but at the Globe and Fortune, the canopy was probably more substantial, and it may have been practicable to use the space between the sloping roof of the 'shadow or cover', as it is called in the Fortune contract, and a flat ceiling laid under it, for windlasses and machinery for lowering people and properties on to the stage.<sup>27</sup> Such machinery could easily have been accommodated at the second Globe, which had a cover surmounted by spacious twin-gabled roofs, and extending almost to the centre of the arena.<sup>28</sup>

The stage was 'paled in' with strong oak boards at the Fortune, and the area underneath was jocularly known as 'hell'. The use of at least one large trapdoor made possible various kinds of startling appearances, like the devil that rises from the stage in Scene 3 of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. George Chapman's *All Fools*, written probably in 1599 for performance by the Admiral's Men, was printed in 1605 with a prologue designed for the Fortune that calls attention to the startling nature of the stage effects made possible by the use of the stage-hell and stage-heavens:

The fortune of a Stage (like Fortune's self)  
 Amazeth greatest judgments; and none knows  
 The hidden causes of those strange effects  
 That rise from this Hell, or fall from this Heaven.

We know least about the appearance of the stage façade, i.e., the tiring-house wall at the rear of the stage. The drawing of the Swan shows two doors in an otherwise flat screen wall, perhaps an echo of the two doors common in the screens in the domestic halls of colleges and private houses, from which Richard Hosley thinks the stage façade at the Swan was derived.<sup>29</sup> At the Rose, however, the polygonal inner frame of the playhouse served as the rear wall of the stage, and the stage façades at the Globe and Fortune were more elaborate than that indicated in the Swan drawing. It is reasonable to suppose that the neo-classical moulding of the columns at the Fortune was carried through the stage façade, in imitation of the Globe. At these theatres there were three stage doors or openings; so, for instance, Thomas Heywood's

<sup>27</sup> Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II.1.304–5.

<sup>28</sup> Foakes, *Illustrations*, p. 37.      <sup>29</sup> Hosley, 'Playhouses', p. 131.



play, *The Four Prentices of London* (Fortune, c. 1600), begins with a prologue specifying 'Enter three in black cloaks, at three doors.'

At the Swan a gallery ran the width of the stage above the doors, and was partitioned into six 'rooms', if De Witt's drawing can be trusted. Here perhaps were the four 'gentlemen's rooms' specified in the Fortune contract; but at the Fortune and Globe, part of this space appears to have been set aside for musicians and for stage action requiring an upper level. The gallery overhung the stage, and hangings mounted on rods affixed to this projection could be used to conceal actors as required behind the 'arras' (see below, p. 19). The tapestries or curtains hung on the stage could, of course, be decorative or symbolic, and there are several references to using black hangings for tragedies;<sup>30</sup> they could also be drawn across one of the doors or openings to make possible discovery scenes. Occasionally, as in Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (Rose, c. 1590), a character in the play draws the curtain himself. The Fortune contract also calls for 'convenient windows and lights glazed' to the tiring-house;<sup>31</sup> and since the tiring-house was to be built within the frame of the theatre, these windows and lights may have been in the tiring-house wall facing the stage. Although there are many references to action taking place at windows, the question of their physical reality is part of a larger problem that may be unresolvable.

The problem, briefly stated, is this: for much of our knowledge about playhouses of the period we depend upon the evidence provided by the stage directions and action of the plays staged there; where the action refers to posts on the stage, or requires three men to enter at different doors, we take this as evidence about the posts and doors which we know must have been there. Beyond such requirements is a grey area where the objects or locations could have been real, or simply imagined; windows perhaps belong in this category. Then there are plays in which the rear wall of the stage serves as the battlements of a city under siege, or a castle, or houses and shops in a street, or a forest, a seashore, or whatever the dramatist declares it to be. I know of no way to establish a boundary between what was done in practice on the stages of the public playhouses, and what was left to the imagination. Many scholars take a minimalist view, and, believing the Swan to be typical, tend to assume that any feature mentioned in the text or stage directions of a play is to be imagined by the audience unless it is indicated in the Swan drawing. I think, for reasons already indicated, that the Swan was not typical, and was superseded by better-equipped theatres such as the Globe and Fortune. Later theatres certainly had practical windows at the rear or sides of the stage, and

<sup>30</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, III.79.

<sup>31</sup> *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 308; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 535.

the Fortune contract would suggest that these were provided there, on the gallery level, along with 'lights' or gratings in the stage doors.

This problem reminds us that the evidence is not easy to interpret, and that all students of the Elizabethan theatres have to rely on some element of speculation. I believe myself that Elizabethan theatres, like modern ones, offered as lavish and brilliant spectacles as they could create. Certainly the costuming could be magnificent; Henslowe, for instance, spent £21, a huge sum then, on velvet, satin, and taffeta for a single play on Cardinal Wolsey (by Henry Chettle; now lost) in 1601.<sup>32</sup> His accounts for this period show that the Fortune company regularly spent large sums on new costumes and properties. An inventory of the costumes of this company made in 1598 confirms contemporary comments on how the players strutted in some splendour on their stages: the list includes numerous items of apparel in satin, taffeta, and cloth of gold; also cloaks, jerkins, breeches, and doublets of various colours, white, tawny, silver, red, black, green, yellow, orange, many of them trimmed with 'gold' (usually copper, as Henslowe's accounts show) or silver lace.<sup>33</sup> Henslowe's payments suggest that they had some concern for an appearance of historical authenticity in costuming plays on recent or contemporary themes (like the lost *Cardinal Wolsey*), but the players were less troubled by historical accuracy in presenting plays on topics drawn from earlier times. The drawing by Henry Peacham of characters in *Titus Andronicus* shows a mixture of costumes: soldiers are dressed in Elizabethan armour, and other figures in tunics appropriate to ancient Rome.<sup>34</sup>

The players also made use of an elaborate range of properties. Henslowe's 1598 inventory<sup>35</sup> includes tombs, a chariot, a bedstead, and other properties fairly often used, but also two steeples, several trees, two moss-banks, a hell-mouth, and the city of Rome. The last item may have been a painted hanging, but we do not know how other properties were managed, or to what extent the players tried to provide settings for their plays. The openings in the tiring-house wall could be made to serve as various locations, and some indications or representations of the scene were certainly employed. So, for instance, Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* (Fortune, c. 1610) calls for three shops in a row, an apothecary's, a feather shop, and a sempster's shop.

Plain-coloured hangings were also used, and the stage was customarily 'hung with black' (Induction, *A Warning for Fair Women*; Theatre/Globe, printed 1599) for tragedies; but painted cloths adorned the stage for other

<sup>32</sup> *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 179.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 321–3; see also Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, pp. 178–83.

<sup>34</sup> Foakes, *Illustrations*, p. 50.      <sup>35</sup> *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 319–21.

plays, and Ben Jonson refers to the ‘fresh pictures, that use to beautify the decayed dead arras, in a public theatre’ (*Cynthia’s Revels*; Blackfriars, 1601). In a later play that mockingly alludes to the public theatres, Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (?Blackfriars, 1607), a joke is made out of an incongruous cloth painted with a representation of the rape of Lucrece. The Jonson allusion suggests that the ‘arras’ or heavy tapestry may have been a permanent feature, and that painted cloths were hung over this when desired. If scenes were generally unlocalized, the imagined locality being indicated in the text, hangings nevertheless could be used to provide an appropriate background; and the curtains could be parted to suggest interior scenes, and allow beds, tables, and other properties to be brought forth or revealed as necessary for the action of a play. Frequently a tableau discovered by opening the curtains dissolves as the participants move out on to the main stage. Remarkable effects could be obtained, as when, after a series of battle scenes, 2 *Tamburlaine*, 2.4 (Rose, 1588) opens with the direction: ‘The Arras is drawn, and Zenocrate lies in her bed of state, Tamburlaine sitting by her; three Physicians about her bed, tempering potions. Theridamas, Techelles and Usumcasane, and the three sons’. The moment of stasis here at the beginning of the death scene of Tamburlaine’s great love halts the flow of action, achieving a visual pathos.

The first part of Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* (Rose, 1587) is famous for its visual effects; Tamburlaine transforms himself from a shepherd into a king, and later changes his costume according to his mood and intentions, from white to scarlet to black, and in 4.4 hangs his ‘bloody colours’ on the tiring-house wall, which serves as the city walls of Damascus. There the citizens ‘walk quivering on their city walls’ (4.4.3), perhaps on the ‘tarras’ or narrow ledge or balcony projecting from the gallery at the rear of the stage. Many plays make use of the different levels of the stage, turning the tiring-house wall into battlements which could be scaled with ladders, or from which proclamations of victory could be announced. The text of 1 *Tamburlaine* also refers to Tamburlaine’s ‘tents of white’ and ‘vermilion tent’ (4.2.III, 117); it is not certain that these were shown on stage in this play (were the tents real or imagined?), though in *Part 2* the stage direction for 4.1 calls for two characters to enter ‘from the tent where Calyphas sits asleep’. Practical tents or pavilions were set up for many plays, with doors or openings allowing for display within, as the stage direction in *Edward I* (Theatre, 1591), 1.1932, suggests: ‘the king sits in his tent with his pages about him’. During the 1580s and 1590s battle scenes were very popular, and in some plays two or more tents were pitched, as most famously in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* (Theatre, 1593) where the tents of the leaders of the opposing armies, Richard and Richmond, are set up on stage in 5.3.

Many different kinds of spectacular effect could be contrived by the use of hangings, of practicable tents, scaffolds, arbours, chairs of state, beds, ladders, trees, and other objects brought on stage, or thrust through the trap-door. The use of fireworks also made possible such effects as the display of lightning, or the effect of a blazing star. The open-air theatres also made much use of loud noises, of trumpets and drums, and the shooting of guns. Processions and dumbshows enlivened scenes with visual effects that could often be striking; so in *Captain Thomas Stukeley* (Rose/Fortune, ?1595; printed 1605), a dumbshow or pantomime in which the hero dithers between joining forces with the Spanish or the Portuguese, then decides to ally himself with the Portuguese, ends ‘and so both armie[s] meeting embrace, when with a sudden thunder-clap the sky is one fire, and the blazing star appears, which they prognosticating to be fortunate departed very joyful’ (sig. κ1r).<sup>36</sup> It is often said that ‘Stage business and spectacle of this kind should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the stages themselves were essentially bare’,<sup>37</sup> but I believe this claim, based on the Swan drawing, is misleading. The stage façade was highly decorated, and the Elizabethan playhouses offered their public colour, spectacle, and richness. The stage was anything but bare; even the platform itself was covered with rushes, probably in part to deaden the noise of the actors’ movements.

The essential point is that no attempt at scenic illusion was made; the stage-location was whatever the dramatist made his actors say it was. This in itself marks an extraordinary development away from the ‘simultaneous’ staging of medieval theatre that lingered on into the 1590s, notably in plays by Lyly and Peele, mainly written for children to perform, and with presentation at court in mind. The use of three-dimensional structures or ‘houses’ placed in different parts of the stage, or along the rear, to represent different localities, gave way as a general principle to successive staging for audiences that loved romances, histories, and tragedies that ranged freely over the known world, like Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, or John Day’s *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (Red Bull, 1607), or Thomas Heywood’s *The Four Prentices of London, with the Siege of Jerusalem* (Rose, ?1594). Parts of the stage could, of course, be identified as particular locations when necessary, as in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (Rose, 1599), where Simon Eyre’s shoemaker’s shop is opened up in 1.4 (‘open my shop windows!’), shut up at 3.2.149, and displayed in 4.1 with ‘Hodge at his shop board’ (stage direction). In 3.4 a ‘sempster’s shop’ is the setting, and probably hinged shutters were made that could serve as windows, and also opened out to form a board or counter. But

<sup>36</sup> See Dieter Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show* (London, 1985), pp. 102–3.

<sup>37</sup> Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, p. 191.

when the shops were closed up, the stage became a street, or a rural place, as at the opening of 1.2, where Rose sits ‘upon this flow’ry bank’ making a garland. It has been argued<sup>38</sup> that mansion staging ‘was imported intact into the first permanent theatres of Elizabethan London’, but I see little evidence to support this claim; indeed, by 1599 the free-ranging spectaculars of the public theatres were drawing the scorn of Ben Jonson, who preferred to observe the neo-classical unities of action and place. In *Every Man out of his Humour* (Globe, 1599), Jonson’s commentators on the action pun on the playwright’s ‘travel’:

MITIS ...how comes it then that in some one play we see so many seas,  
countries, and kingdoms passed over with such admirable dexterity?

CORDATUS Oh, that but shows how well the authors can travail in their  
vocation, and outrun the apprehension of their auditory.

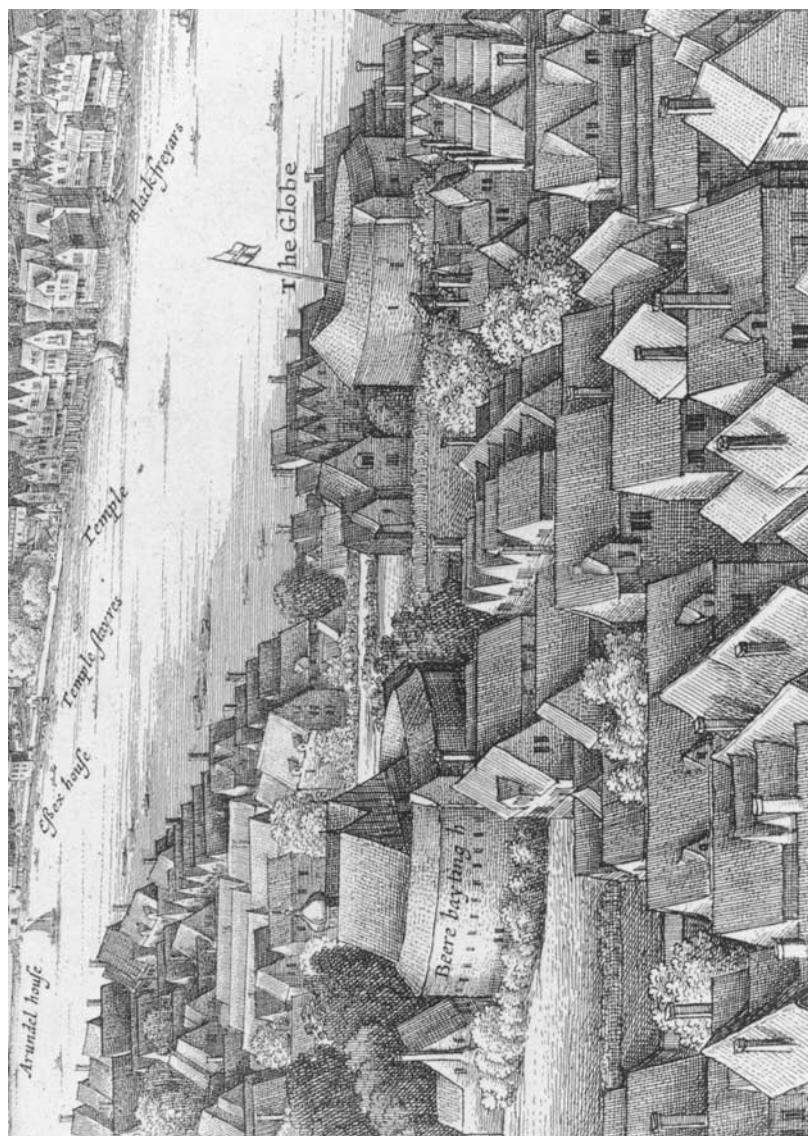
(Induction, 269–72)

As long as the open-air, public theatres had a virtual monopoly on playing, that is, up to about 1600, they may have paid less attention to the comfort of spectators in the arena and galleries than to improvements in the stage area. In the winter especially, the spectators must have been often exposed to cold and damp. If the first Globe had a diameter of about 100 feet,<sup>39</sup> then an area of more than 2,000 square feet could have been directly exposed to rain. The new design of the second Globe (1613), as shown in Hollar’s ‘Long View’, included a large roofed area covering all the stage and at least half the arena. This modification reduced the area exposed directly to the sky, and made the galleries, especially those areas near the stage, less vulnerable to the wind and rain. The Fortune, being square and smaller (the sides were 80 feet long), had a much smaller area directly open to the sky, perhaps 1,300 square feet; probably the square or rectangular Red Bull had a similar design. The first Globe was thatched, the second, like the Fortune, tiled. When the Fortune burned down in 1621, it was replaced by a round brick building, ‘partly open to the weather’,<sup>40</sup> but no doubt much more enclosed than the early playhouses. There had, of course, to be sufficient daylight for the actors to perform, and some stages appear to have faced north-east, perhaps to ensure an even light without glare or strong contrasts in the stage area.<sup>41</sup>

In this respect the arena playhouses of the period 1576–1642 were radically different from modern theatres, in which actors usually appear behind a proscenium arch, under spotlights, in front of an audience sitting in a darkened auditorium. It is a matter of fundamental importance that actor and

<sup>38</sup> Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II.1.8–9.      <sup>39</sup> Orrell, *Quest*, pp. 99–104.

<sup>40</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.443.      <sup>41</sup> Foakes, *Illustrations*, pp. 37–8.



6 Hollar's 'Long View of London from Bankside', 1647; section showing the Globe and Beargarden – Hollar has reversed their designations

audience shared the same lighting, and, effectively therefore, the same space in the arena playhouses, since the stage projected into the middle of the building. One reason these theatres stayed in business was that they provided an especially close relationship between actors and audience, with no visual barrier between them, allowing the actor to identify as intimately as he pleased with spectators, or to distance himself within the action. 'Awareness of the illusion as illusion was therefore much closer to the surface all the time.'<sup>42</sup> Dramatists continually exploited this awareness, in prologues, inductions, jokes, metaphors, and plays within the play, reminding their audiences of the fictive nature of what they were watching, and of the uncertain boundary between illusion and reality. Two devices used with especial brilliance were the aside, in which an actor could step out of his role for a moment to comment on the action, and the soliloquy, in which the actor could address the audience directly, seem to take it into his confidence, or, as in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (Globe, 1607), switch, in attacking vice, from commenting on the grotesque characters of the unnamed Italian court which is the play's setting, and involve the audience directly. Holding up his moral emblem of a skull in a woman's head-dress, Vindice cries,

See, ladies, with false forms,  
You deceive men, but cannot deceive worms.  
(3.5.96-7)

There are no ladies on stage, and those in the audience are confronted momentarily with a frightening reality.

### The early private playhouses

By 1600 the public playhouses were beginning to face competition. In the early years of her reign, Queen Elizabeth had relied heavily for dramatic entertainment during the Christmas and Shrovetide festival seasons on performances at court by the boys of the choir and grammar schools associated with St Paul's cathedral, and the choirboys of the Chapel Royal at Windsor. Richard Farrant, an enterprising master of the choirboys at Windsor, and deputy master of the boys of the parallel Chapel Royal that served the court in London, had become well known as a presenter of plays at court when, in 1576, he took a lease on rooms in the old Blackfriars monastery in the city in order to establish a playhouse for his boys, perhaps in association with the Paul's boys. After Farrant's death in 1580, the lease passed to the dramatist

<sup>42</sup> Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, p. 180.

John Lyly, and under his guidance playing continued there until 1584. This was the first roofed, indoor playhouse in London. The space available was quite small, in all about 46 by 26 feet, and rectangular.<sup>43</sup> Probably the boys performed once or twice a week, and the audiences must have been small, so that their impact on the public arena playhouses was at first slight. Indeed, after 1576, professional adult companies increasingly displaced the boys in providing plays for court festivities.

Nevertheless, the establishment of the first Blackfriars playhouse between 1576 and 1584 marked a major innovation in offering to a select audience a sophisticated alternative to the dramatic fare provided at the adult theatres. The Paul's boys, under their new master, Thomas Giles, appointed in 1584, continued to present plays by Lyly at court, and they performed in the precincts of St Paul's cathedral until their activities were suppressed about 1590, when they gave offence by handling matters of divinity and state in connection with the Martin Marprelate controversy.<sup>44</sup> Much of the repertory of the boys' companies from this period is lost, but it included morality plays, classical pastorals like Peele's *The Arraignment of Paris* (1584), and the graceful court comedies of Lyly, usually based on classical themes, but laced with topical allegory, as in *Endymion* and *Midas*. These may have come to seem old-fashioned by the late 1580s, when the ascendancy of the professional adult players is indicated in the establishment of a select company of Queen's Men, under the direct patronage of the crown, in 1583. The dramatic activities of the boys up to 1590 depended, in any case, on the enthusiasm of particular masters, and it was not until 1599–1600 that another master of Paul's boys, Edward Pearce, launched a new period of quasi-professional playing in a hall within the precincts of St Paul's cathedral. The exact location of this hall has not been identified with certainty; but if Reavley Gair is right, it was very small, polygonal in shape so that it could appear as 'round' (Prologue to *Antonio's Revenge*, 1600), and seated perhaps 100 spectators at most.<sup>45</sup> However, the small stage had three doors, with windows above the two side doors, and an alcove with curtains above the central double doors.<sup>46</sup> The boys were able to draw on some of the best new talent among emerging dramatists, staging plays by Marston, Chapman, and Middleton, and their instant success may have encouraged Henry Evans to take a lease in 1600 on the Blackfriars property James Burbage had bought in 1596 (see above, p. 6), in order to establish a professional company of boys there. In

<sup>43</sup> This is Wickham's estimate, *Early English Stages*, II.2.127.

<sup>44</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV.229–33; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 310–11.

<sup>45</sup> Reavley Gair, *The Children of Paul's* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 66–7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58–9.



this theatre, by an arrangement with Evans, Nathaniel Giles, Master of the choirboys of the Chapel Royal, began to stage plays regularly; he began with some old ones, including at least one by Lyly, but also introduced work by new dramatists, like Ben Jonson, whose *Poetaster* in 1601 poked fun at the adult players and their theatres.

The second Blackfriars playhouse was much larger than that at Paul's, and measured 66 by 46 feet; it had at least two galleries of seating for spectators, and could accommodate perhaps as many as 500. Nothing is known about the size and disposition of the stage area at Blackfriars, other than what can be gleaned from the stage directions and texts of plays put on there. Both the Paul's and Blackfriars playhouses were located within the boundaries of the city of London, but in precincts that retained ancient ecclesiastical liberties, and were not under the direct jurisdiction of civic authority. By 1608, when a new charter gave the city authority over the old liberties, the playhouses and their companies had been taken under royal protection.<sup>47</sup> The methods of operation of the indoor playhouses were presumably sufficiently different from those of the adult theatres, since they were able to ignore the restrictions imposed by the Privy Council in a minute of 1598 and reinforced in an order of 1600, proclaiming that 'there shall be about the City two houses [i.e., the Globe and Fortune] and no more allowed to serve for the use of common stage plays'.<sup>48</sup> Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (1601) was published as 'privately acted' at Blackfriars, and from about this time the indoor playhouses at Paul's and Blackfriars became generally known as 'private' theatres, in contrast to 'public' playhouses like the Globe and Fortune. The private theatres staged plays less frequently; Frederic Gerschow, a German who recorded a visit to Blackfriars on 18 September 1602, said the boys there performed once a week on Saturdays.<sup>49</sup> They began performances at later times, 3 or 4 in the afternoon, as against 2 o'clock, the customary time at the public theatres. They may have had different arrangements for admission, with some system of advance booking rather than payment at the door; and they may have advertised merely by word of mouth or by hand-bills, rather than sticking 'playbills upon every post' (*A Warning for Fair Women*, Induction, 75; Theatre/Globe, printed 1599). But whatever differences in practice there may have been, the private and public theatres were all staging plays for the entertainment of a paying audience.

The private playhouses charged much higher prices; in 1599–1600, when standing-room cost a penny at the public theatres, and a seat in the galleries twopence, the private playhouses were charging sixpence. All the audience

<sup>47</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.480; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 123.

<sup>48</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV.330.      <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, II.46–8.

were seated at the private houses, and higher prices meant that these theatres attracted gallants, 'select and most respected auditors' (Marston, Prologue to *Antonio and Mellida*; Paul's, 1599–1600), and gentlewomen, 'the female presence; the Genteletza' (Marston, Induction to *What You Will*; Paul's, 1604). The boys acted by candlelight; in this same induction, 'Before the Music sounds for the Act', three characters enter and 'sit a good while on the Stage before the Candles are lighted'. A reference in a poem of 1629 to the 'torchy Friars'<sup>50</sup> may indicate how the auditorium was lit. They apparently shuttered the playhouse windows for tragedies, if Thomas Dekker's simile in a pamphlet of 1606, *Seven Deadly Sins*, can be trusted: 'All the city looked like a private playhouse, when the windows are clapped down, as if some *nocturnal*, or dismal *tragedy* were to be presented.' Playing indoors, with artificial lighting, the companies of boys also provided music between the acts of a play.

This was an innovation, for act divisions do not at this time appear to have been observed as intervals at the public theatres, and music was not played between the acts, as the Induction to Marston's *Malcontent* (Paul's; revised for the Globe, 1604) testifies. At Blackfriars music was played before the performance began, and sometimes there was dancing or singing too between the acts. Probably intervals were required because the candles needed to be trimmed; but music was a special feature of small, enclosed theatres, where soft sounds could be heard, and a range of instruments used. Blackfriars had an orchestra of 'organs [meaning pipes], lutes, pandores [ancestor of the modern banjo], violins, and flutes', as well as a double-bass, according to Gerschow.<sup>51</sup> The tiny Paul's theatre had two 'music-houses' above and on either side of the stage, for, in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1600), the ghost of Andrugio is placed between them during a dance in 5.3, to look down on the final revenge of his murder, and comment on it before the curtains are drawn across the alcove in which he sits, and he is able to make his exit (5.3.115).

Not much is known about the stages and seating arrangements at the private theatres. The stages were small by comparison with those of the public playhouses. There were boxes or lords' rooms at Blackfriars, apparently at the sides of the stage. The evidence of stage directions shows that there were three doors for use by actors in entering and leaving the stage<sup>52</sup> at both the private houses. One innovation apparently introduced at public theatres in the late 1590s became a feature of the private houses, especially Blackfriars; this was the practice of allowing members of the audience, who paid extra

<sup>50</sup> Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 237.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.47.      <sup>52</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, III.132.

for the privilege, to have a stool and sit on the stage. If the stage at Blackfriars was at one end of the hall, and extended most of the width of the room, there may have been space both for boxes and also for gallants who wished to display themselves to sit on the sides of the stage, without interfering with the sight-lines of other members of the audience, or with the action of the play itself.<sup>53</sup> In his play *The Devil is an Ass* (Blackfriars, 1616), Ben Jonson offers a vivid glimpse of one kind of foolish gallant, a squire of Norfolk, Fitzdottrell, showing off to his friends, to his wife, and to the women in the audience:

Today I go to the Blackfriars Playhouse  
Sit i'the view, salute all my acquaintance,  
Rise up between the acts, let fall my cloak,  
Publish a handsome man, and a rich suit  
(As that's a special end, why we go thither,  
All that pretend, to stand for't o'the stage)  
The ladies ask who's that? (For they do come  
To see us, love, as we do to see them).

(1.6.31–8)

The private theatres, then, offered several kinds of refinement not available at the public playhouses: a more select clientele; greater comfort, including cushions on the benches (at the public playhouses the audience at this time sat on benches 'not adorned with mats', according to William Davenant's Prologue to *The Unfortunate Lovers*; Blackfriars, 1638); protection from the weather; and music and songs between the acts.

The boys' companies specialized for some years after 1600 in satiric comedies, and their characteristic style of playing has been described as 'antimimetic' in contrast to what has been seen as the naive illusionism of the adult theatres.<sup>54</sup> This seems too categorical an opposition, since the adult companies always seem to have practised a mode of self-conscious theatre, playing against the audience's awareness of the stage as only a stage (see Chapter 2 for fuller discussion of this matter). At the same time, it would appear that the boys, playing and mimicking adults, invited their audiences to be more continuously critical and detached, and were more stridently antimimetic in their frequent mockery of what they portrayed as old-fashioned

<sup>53</sup> Herbert Berry, 'The stage and boxes at Blackfriars', *SP* 63 (1966), reprinted in *Shakespeare's Playhouses* (New York, 1987); Berry speculates about the location of the boxes, and guesses that they might have been at the rear of the stage. See also the mock advice in Dekker's *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609), cited in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV.365–9.

<sup>54</sup> Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 153.

public-theatre modes of drama or styles of verse. They deliberately catered to a more select and homogeneous audience, seeking to create the consciousness of an in-group that would appreciate their railing, an audience drawn largely from gallants, gentlemen and gentlewomen, and the sons of gentlemen who thronged the nearby Inns of Court, treating these as finishing schools rather than as institutions for serious study of the law.

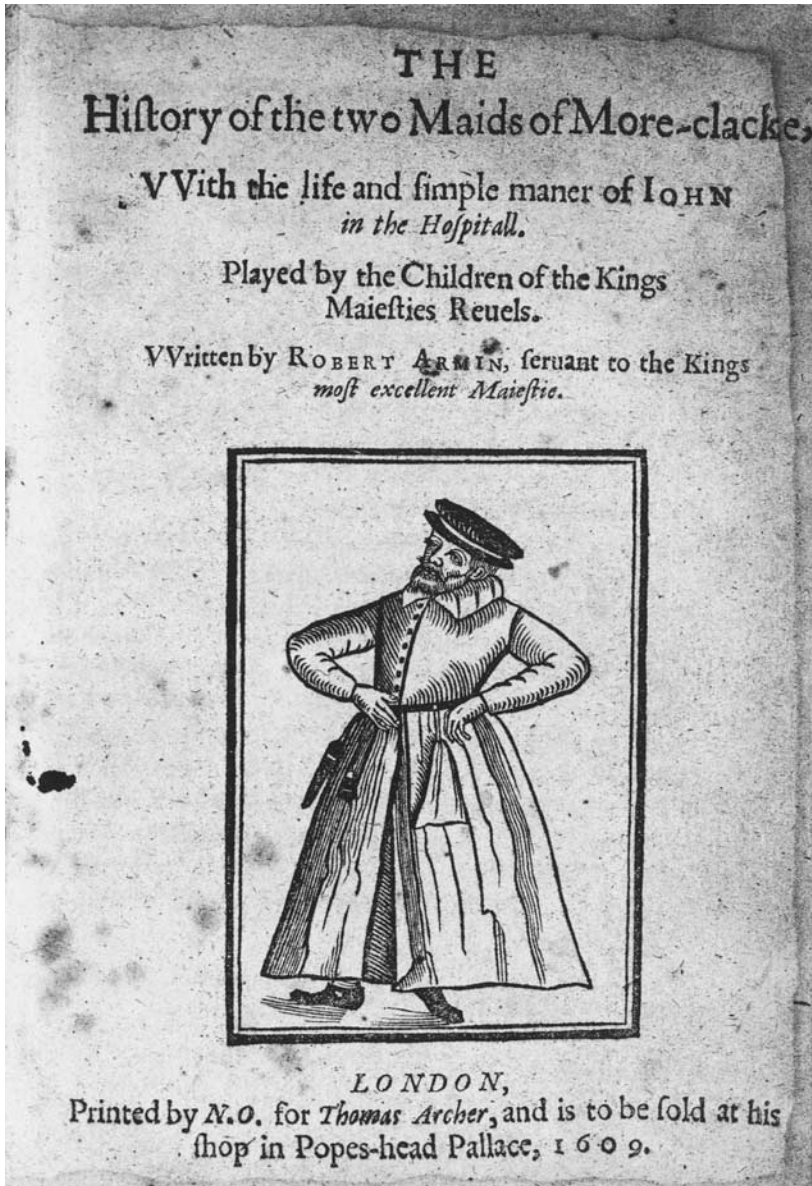
Initially the private theatres succeeded in drawing a 'good, gentle Audience' (*Jack Drum's Entertainment*, 1600, sig. H3v) to Paul's, and offering at Blackfriars 'a nest of boys able to ravish a man', according to Thomas Middleton's advice to a gallant in *Father Hubbard's Tales*, 1604.<sup>55</sup> So too in the bad Quarto of *Hamlet*, 1603, Gilderstone says in 2.2 'the principal public audience ... are turned to private plays'. However, the boys had a more limited range than the adult players, and the satirical comedies which they preferred were always liable to give offence either to civic authorities or to the court. Furthermore, boy actors grew out of their parts as they became adults, so it is not surprising that the companies tended to have brief and chequered careers. For a variety of reasons the fortunes of the Paul's boys declined by 1606,<sup>56</sup> and they ceased playing altogether. By 1603 Middleton had replaced Marston as their principal dramatist, and the ageing of the boys may be reflected in the tone of some later plays he wrote for them, targeting the corruptions of unscrupulous usurers or lawyers in London rather than the corruptions of a court. Like the adult companies, the boys at Blackfriars were given a measure of royal protection in 1603 with the title of Children of the Queen's Revels, but lost their privilege because of offence caused by what James took to be insults against the Scots in *Eastward Ho* (1605); two of the authors (Chapman and Jonson) were imprisoned, and the third (Marston) fled. Then in 1607–8, more serious offence was given by topical comments on the French in Chapman's play *The Conspiracy of Charles, Duke of Byron*, and in some lost play which included criticism of James himself. The company survived, and the King seems quickly to have forgotten his vow that 'they should never play more';<sup>57</sup> indeed, they staged three plays at court for the Christmas festivities in 1608. Then in 1609, the King's Men, who had obtained a surrender of the lease Richard Burbage had inherited from his father on the Blackfriars theatre, took possession of it, and began to use it as a winter house, continuing to play at the Globe during the summer months.

The Blackfriars company of boys seems to have been absorbed into the group playing at Whitefriars, another hall theatre converted before 1609

<sup>55</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.50.

<sup>56</sup> Gair, *Paul's*, pp. 172–3; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 307.

<sup>57</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.54; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 514–15.



7 Robert Armin, title-page of *The Two Maids of Moreclack*, performed by the Children of the King's Revels, 1606–7

from some portion of the old monastic buildings situated between Fleet Street and the Thames. Here they continued to work as the Children of the Queen's Revels until 1613, when they amalgamated with an adult company, the Lady Elizabeth's Men, playing at the Swan, with the intention of using Whitefriars as a winter playhouse, and the Swan as a summer house, in emulation of the King's Men at Blackfriars and the Globe. However, the lease at Whitefriars ran out in 1614, and, with the building of the new Hope on Bankside, activity at the Swan was curtailed; little further is known about the Whitefriars theatre. The boys' companies at the private theatres thus flourished for a relatively short period. It may be that they ran out of steam, exhausting for their audiences the variations that could be worked in the kinds of play they did best; but a more important factor may have been the ageing of the companies. Still, their impact during the period from 1599 to 1614 was enormous. They established the desirability of enclosed theatres for winter playing, and the idea of a winter season (at Whitefriars performances were given only from Michaelmas to Easter). They showed that small theatres, charging higher prices, could operate profitably for a select audience; and after 1614 no more public arena theatres were built, apart from the replacement of the Fortune after it burned down in 1621.

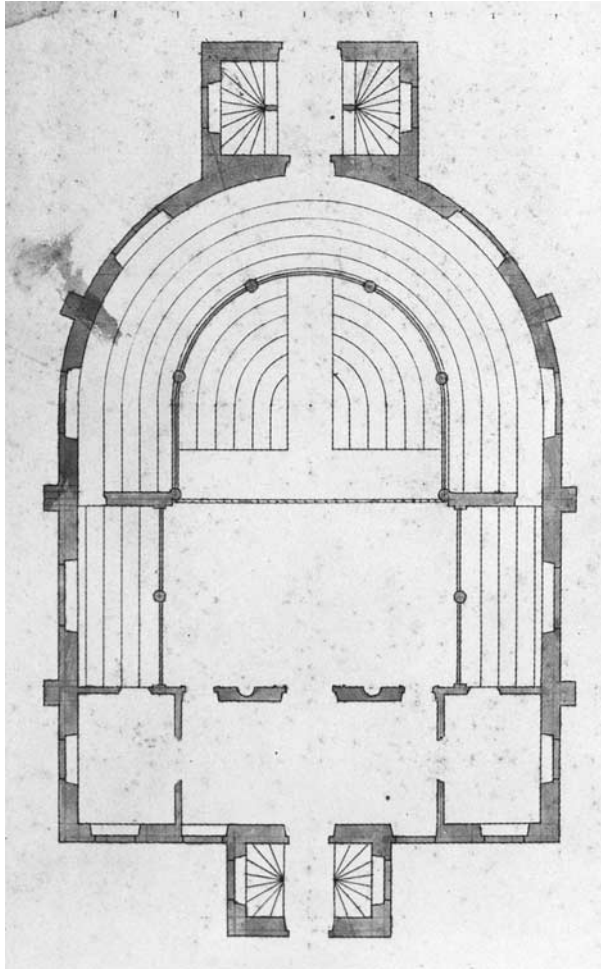
The development of the indoor playhouses at Paul's, Blackfriars, and Whitefriars points to an increasing concern not only for refinement, comfort, and sophistication, but also for a kind of naturalism. In these theatres the relation of the audience to the stage was fundamentally changed. At the public theatres the groundlings stood nearest to the stage, and spectators paid more to sit further away in the galleries; at the private playhouses, as in modern theatres, the expensive seats were those closest to the stage. At the public theatres, actors would literally play to the galleries, if they played to the most esteemed part of their audience, and in open-air theatres on stages that would require bold and strong delivery of lines. At the private theatres, where for the players the most important part of the audience was seated nearest the stage, a more low-keyed and intimate style was possible. The idea of what is 'natural', of course, changes all the time. By the 1590s the playhouses of the previous two decades were noted for what had now come to seem bombast and strutting; so Robert Greene makes a player in his *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) boast, 'The twelve labours of Hercules have I terribly thundered on the stage.' At the beginning of the seventeenth century the style of plays popular in the late 1580s and 1590s had come to seem unnatural or old-fashioned to the new dramatists like Jonson and Marston; so, for instance, *The Spanish Tragedy* (Rose/Fortune, 1587) is mocked or parodied in several plays, such as Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* (Paul's, 1599), and Ben Jonson imagines a foolish playgoer in

the induction to *Cynthia's Revels* (Blackfriars, 1601) swearing 'that the old Hieronimo, as it was first acted, was the only best, and judiciously penned play of Europe' (191–2). Then again, by 1607 or so Beaumont, writing for the now well-established private theatres, could, in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, mock not only old plays like *The Spanish Tragedy*, and Heywood's *Four Prentices of London* (Red Bull, published 1615, but an old play then), but also contemporary works that appealed to 'citizens', like Heywood's *If You Know not Me, You Know Nobody* (Curtain/Red Bull, 1605), and *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* by John Day, William Rowley, and George Wilkins (Curtain/Red Bull, 1607). If the choicest blank verse of one decade seemed mere bombast to the next, the private theatres brought a qualitative shift because of the change in the audience's relationship to the stage, and the greater intimacy of the space. This is seen most markedly in the new comedies, written in prose rather than blank verse, set in London, and concerned with such matters as the tricking of a miserly rich uncle by a poor but witty gentleman named Witgood (Middleton, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*; Paul's/Blackfriars, 1605); or with the outwitting of another difficult uncle by Truewit (Jonson, *Epicene*; Whitefriars, 1609). In another play in which a usurer is punished (Chapman, Jonson, and Marston, *Eastward Ho*, Blackfriars, 1605), an amusing in-joke is the reduction of Hamlet, the public-theatre prince, to a rather different role: the cast includes 'Hamlet, a footman'.

### The later theatres

The three new theatres erected for public performances between 1615 and 1642 were all small, indoor playhouses. The first, the so-called Porter's Hall (1615–16), was probably never finished, because the inhabitants of the Blackfriars area where it was located successfully petitioned to have it suppressed. Playing ceased there by 1617, but the title-pages of two plays, Nathan Field's *Amends for Ladies* and Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* (both 1618), state that these were performed there.<sup>58</sup> The second theatre, the Cockpit in Drury Lane, or Phoenix, as it came to be known, was situated to the west of the city limits, in an increasingly affluent suburb, convenient both for Westminster and the Inns of Court. This theatre was converted from a cockpit in 1616–17; the circular building may have been extended into a U-shaped auditorium, with two galleries for spectators, which probably measured 55 feet by 40 feet.<sup>59</sup> The new playhouse at once became the 'favourite resort of the gentry' after

<sup>58</sup> Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vi.85.      <sup>59</sup> Foakes, *Illustrations*, pp. 64–7.

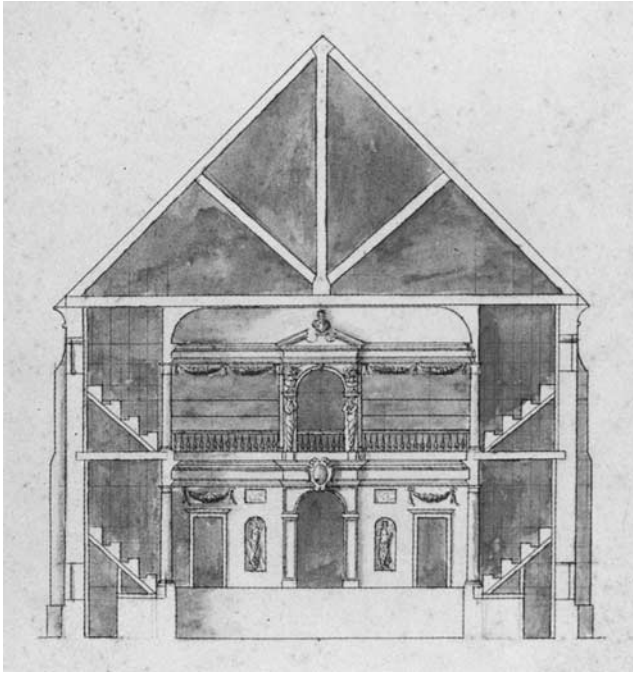


8 Drawing by Inigo Jones of about 1616, thought to be of the plan and stage façade of the Cockpit or Phoenix theatre, Drury Lane: (a) the plan

Blackfriars.<sup>60</sup> The third playhouse, converted from a barn, was the Salisbury Court, built in 1629–30 in the Whitefriars area, between Fleet Street and the River Thames. This also was 40 feet wide, but nothing more is known about its dimensions. However, it was sometimes referred to in plays staged there as a ‘little House’ (Thomas Nabbes, Epilogue to *Tottenham Court* (1633)), and it was probably smaller and less well fitted up than the Blackfriars and Phoenix. It never seems to have enjoyed the same success and prestige as the

<sup>60</sup> Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vi.47.





8 (b) the stage façade

other two. A fourth new theatre of some importance was built on the site of a cockpit at court in Whitehall in 1630; the building was 58 feet square, and the design, with two galleries of seating, and a painted stage façade, retained many features common to other playhouses. This theatre, however, planned by Inigo Jones for court performances, had an elaborate semi-circular stage façade with five doors in it.<sup>61</sup>

A new kind of private theatre thus achieved ascendancy after 1617, operated by adult companies; the Cockpit/Phoenix and Salisbury Court joined the Blackfriars, used as a winter playhouse by the King's Men since 1609, as theatres with an increasing appeal to the gentry. The early theatres were located either on Bankside, south of the Thames, or to the north and east of the city limits; the later theatres were all within the city in areas protected by the crown, or in the western and north-west suburbs, in areas of growing population and wealth. The population of London doubled between 1600 and 1650, rising from about 200,000 inhabitants to 400,000, a growth brought about by a massive influx of people from the provinces. This growth increasingly fostered a polarization of society that seems more and more marked

<sup>61</sup> Foakes, *Illustrations*, pp. 68–71; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 623–6.

through the reigns of James I and Charles I. Dramatists writing for the later private theatres were inclined to congratulate their audiences for their sophistication, and distance themselves from the fare provided at the arena playhouses.

For many years in an age that lacked newspapers, films, television, and all the numerous forms of commercial entertainment now available, the public playhouses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were truly popular in that all ranks of society might be found there:

For as we see at all the playhouse doors,  
When ended is the play, the dance, and song,  
A thousand townsmen, gentlemen, and whores  
Porters and serving-men together throng.  
(Sir John Davies, Epigram 17, 'In Cosmum', ?1593)<sup>62</sup>

Going to the theatre, moreover, did not demand literacy in an age when most of the population was illiterate. In later years there developed what became a well-established pecking order, as far as theatres were concerned, in the minds of those who wrote for and attended the private playhouses, especially the Blackfriars and Phoenix. Writers were ready to sneer at the competition of the Red Bull, and Thomas Carew, writing prefatory verses for Davenant's *The Just Italian* in 1630, was not alone in his contempt for

that adulterate stage, where not a tongue  
Of th'untuned kennel, can a line repeat  
Of serious sense,

or in his praise of the 'natural, unstrained action' offered by 'the true brood of actors' at Blackfriars.<sup>63</sup> But if it was easy to take a lofty attitude towards the Red Bull or the Fortune, with their jigs, target-fights, clowning, and the 'shag-haired devils' (in the ever-popular *Doctor Faustus*) that ran 'roaring over the stage with squibs in their mouths, while drummers make thunder in the tiring-house, and the twelve-penny hirelings make artificial lightning in their heavens' (John Melton, *Astrologaster*, 1620, p. 31), this sensationalism of staging was paralleled by a new fashion on the private stages: for their refinement and sophistication included a taste for a sensationalism of content in plays that deal with sexual perversity or deviance, and toy with rape, incest, and adultery, like Beaumont and Fletcher's *A King and No King* (King's Men, Blackfriars, 1611), or Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (Phoenix, 1632).

<sup>62</sup> Gurr, *Playgoing*, pp. 65–6.      <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

The professional companies had guarded their repertoires, since it was customary for the company to buy a play outright from the author(s), and it was in the interest of each company not to allow too many of those which remained in the repertory to come into print. However, the private theatres sought to create a kind of collusion with their audience, as the increasing use of inductions, prologues, and epilogues suggests. During the reign of Charles 'a flourishing literary world was gradually being established'<sup>64</sup> around the leading private playhouses. Many plays were copied and circulated in manuscript, and many more were published within a year or two of first performance, often with prologues, epilogues, and commendatory verses, all creating a link between the play and its audience. It would appear that audiences at the private theatres were now in the main literate, and plays were being written to be read, not just performed. It may well be true that 'Plays by Brome, Shirley and Davenant offered the audience images of themselves in parks, squares, taverns and gaming houses, supplying standards against which forms and codes of behaviour could be established, scrutinized and adjusted.'<sup>65</sup> The decor and design of the private theatres also reflected a change in taste; for while the early large playhouses were round or square, and were related to bear-baiting rings and inn-yards, the later private playhouses were small and rectangular, and incorporated ideas borrowed from Renaissance Italian architectural treatises, like those of Andrea Palladio and Sebastiano Serlio, studied by Inigo Jones, whose designs survive for what may be the Cockpit/Phoenix in 1616–17. The stage façade had an elegant elevation in the manner of Palladio, with a round-arched central opening, flanked by two square-headed niches with sculpted figures in them, and two square-headed doors surmounted by ornamental scrolls (see pp. 32–3). The railed gallery above also had a central, pedimented arch, opening into a space apparently reserved for actors or musicians, since seating continued through the galleries on either side.<sup>66</sup> The later theatres also had low rails around the outside of the stage; these are first mentioned in 1604.

It would be wrong to conclude that there was a clear-cut distinction between the audiences and the repertoires at the indoor playhouses and those at the public theatres. Not only did the King's Men continue to play at the Blackfriars and the Globe, but there was considerable interchange of repertory between the Cockpit and the Red Bull. At the private theatres gentlemen and gentlewomen paid their shilling to sit in the pit, but the audience included 'the faeces or grounds of your people, that sit in the oblique caves and wedges

<sup>64</sup> Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 105.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110–11.      <sup>66</sup> Foakes, *Illustrations*, p. 66.

of your house, your sinful sixpenny mechanics' (Ben Jonson, Induction to *The Magnetic Lady*; Blackfriars, 1632). There is evidence of gentry attending the Globe, while on one notable occasion Count Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador, visited the rebuilt Fortune in 1621, and the players feasted him in the adjoining garden.<sup>67</sup> Although the King's Men had the lion's share of court performances, other companies were also invited to play there from time to time. The northern theatres, the Red Bull and Fortune, catered primarily to audiences who preferred old-fashioned kinds of drama, and the Red Bull especially offered a repertory largely drawn from the popular tradition of chivalry, romance, farce, history, and fantasy.<sup>68</sup>

The 'Praeludium' to Thomas Goffe's *The Careless Shepherdess* (Salisbury Court, 1638) consists of a debate between 'Spark', an Inns of Court man; 'Spruce', a courtier; 'Thrift', a citizen; and 'Landlord', a country gentleman. For Spark and Spruce, the 'Prerogative of the wits in Town' is to 'censure Poetry' according to the 'Laws of Comedy and Tragedy' (sig. B2r–B2v); but Landlord wants to see again the Fool in *The Changeling* (1622), an old play he once saw at this playhouse, while Thrift decides to recover the shilling he has paid:

I'll go to the Bull, or Fortune, and there see  
A Play for two pence, with a Jig to boot.  
(sig. B4v)

Thrift's remark implies that the other theatres had abandoned the practice, continued at the Red Bull and Fortune, of following the performance of a play with an afterpiece in the form of a jig, or brief farcical entertainment with songs or dances (but see below, pp. 44–5). To Spark and Spruce, both Thrift and Landlord appear fools; Spark dismisses them:

'Tis hard to tell which is the verier fool,  
The Country Gentleman, or Citizen:  
Your judgments are ridiculous and vain  
As your Forefathers, whose dull intellect  
Did nothing understand but fools and fighting.  
(sig. B3r)

At the same time a different kind of drama was being played at the Phoenix and Salisbury Court, where 'the more popular end of the fashionable spectrum participated in the Elizabethan tradition too'.<sup>69</sup> In these theatres old

<sup>67</sup> Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 545.

<sup>68</sup> Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, pp. 181–3.      <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183–4.

patriotic plays on the reigns of Henry VIII or Queen Elizabeth were revived, and new political comedies were presented, most notably those of Richard Brome, perhaps the most important dramatist of the period. All these plays reflected growing dissatisfaction with the rule of Charles I, and show that audiences for them were interested in a 'drama that was sceptical, critical and levelling'.<sup>70</sup> It is arguable that much of the most significant drama of the period was being staged at these theatres, and it will not do to take the snobbish sentiments of a Spark or Spruce too literally.

Others who paid their shilling at the private theatres in the 1630s also looked for plays to please gentlewomen, plays that could be judged as 'matter for serious discussion'.<sup>71</sup> This was especially true of the Blackfriars playhouse, which drew on the talents of new dramatists like Sir William Davenant, whose links were with a court circle patronized by Queen Henrietta Maria; she attended special privately arranged performances at Blackfriars on at least three occasions between 1634 and 1638. Although old plays were revived by the King's Men, amongst them Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* (1607), Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613), and *Sir John Oldcastle*, a play written for the Admiral's Men in 1599 by Michael Drayton and others, the main repertory consisted of the plays of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Ben Jonson, together with new work by Davenant, Massinger, Shirley, and others. The patrons who paid to sit in the pit no doubt were like these new dramatists in priding themselves on their wit and disdaining the 'Good easy judging souls' who used to 'expect a jig, or target fight' (Davenant, Prologue to *The Unfortunate Lovers*, printed 1643).

The new drama of the Blackfriars during the Caroline period shows a conscious rejection of the highly charged and often highly metaphorical dramatic verse exemplified in Marlowe's 'mighty line', in the energy of the old history plays, or in the fierce compression of plays like *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607), in favour of a verse so limpid and quiet that it seems a much more naturalistic vehicle for the conversation of educated characters who are no longer quite different from the audience in being distanced by romance or history, made heroic, or heroically corrupt, and being further differentiated by a stylized speech in strongly marked verse; but rather speak a language much closer to that of the better patrons who prized ease and wit. The preference of the Blackfriars audience for sophistication and wit rather than vigorous action and clowning may mean that the old plays that survived in the repertories of the private theatres were adapted to some extent to a new style of playing. Certainly the Red Bull was noted for its noisy and vulgar

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.      <sup>71</sup> Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 179.

audience,<sup>72</sup> and for plays full of fights and bombast, at a time when the private playhouses were accelerating a shift towards refinement, and appealing to more consciously critical audiences, including the ‘noble Gentlemen’ who sat as ‘high Commissioners of wit’ (Shirley, Prologue to *The Coronation*; Phoenix, 1635).

### Players and playing

In 1583, the Queen’s Secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham, directed the Master of the Revels, Edmond Tylney, to select players from the dozen or more companies then operating mainly in the provinces: Edmond Howes, in his continuation of John Stow’s *Annals* (1615), recorded what happened:<sup>73</sup>

Comedians and stage-players of former times were very poor and ignorant in respect of these of this time: but being now grown very skilful and exquisite actors for all matters, they were entertained into the service of divers great lords: out of which companies there were twelve of the best chosen, and, at the request of Sir Francis Walsingham, they were sworn the queen’s servants and were allowed wages and liveries as grooms of the chamber: and until the year 1583, the queen had no players.

Howes went on to note that there were two ‘rare men’ among the actors, Robert Wilson and Richard Tarlton, both noted for their ‘extemporal wit’. The establishment of this company under royal protection in London marked the beginning of a new and enhanced social stature for leading actors. It is an exaggeration to claim, as Gurr does, that Tarlton, ‘the wonder of his time’ as Howes called him, ‘became the chief emblem of the emerging national consciousness at the end of the sixteenth century’,<sup>74</sup> but he certainly acquired a legendary reputation by the time of his death in 1588. He was loved for his clowning, his impromptu songs and rhymes, and his repartee, though the collection of *Tarlton’s Jestes* published after his death (the earliest edition is of 1611) merely uses his name to sell what is largely a gathering of old chestnuts. He was equally popular at court and in the provinces, where he could make an audience laugh simply by sticking his head out ‘the tire-house door and tapestry between’ (Henry Peacham, *Thalia’s Banquet*, 1620, Epigram 94). Less is known about Robert Wilson, but, like Tarlton, he became conspicuous as an actor in the 1570s, and ended his career with the Queen’s Men.

<sup>72</sup> Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, VI.238–47.

<sup>73</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.104–5; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 208.

<sup>74</sup> Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 121.



9 John Scottowe, drawing of the actor Richard Tarlton (?1588); see p. 38

Tylney picked out twelve men to form the Queen's company, and perhaps already a norm was established of twelve sharers in the company: ten or twelve seems to have remained the usual number.<sup>75</sup> The sharers in the early companies were the principal players, and their shares constituted their investment in their joint stock of playing apparel, properties, and playbooks. The companies did not own theatre buildings, but normally made an arrangement with the owner of a theatre to perform there in return for a proportion of the takings, half the money collected in the galleries at their

<sup>75</sup> G. E. Bentley, *Profession of Player* (Princeton, N.J., 1984), p. 42.

daily performances.<sup>76</sup> Before the erection of the first custom-built theatres in London in 1576, the companies had been used to a peripatetic life, and indeed, the Queen's Men spent much of their time in the 1580s on the road, visiting Norwich, Bristol, Leicester, Cambridge, Bath, Dover, and other towns.<sup>77</sup> The companies had no habit at this time of settling in one place and investing in a theatre building.

Even when the first professional theatres were established in London, life for most of the companies could at any moment become precarious. They might be forced to seek another theatre if relations with the current owner became strained. Other circumstances beyond their control might force a company to regroup, break up, move to the provinces, or go abroad to travel in northern Europe, where English players were in demand. After the death of Tarlton, the Queen's Men seem to have lost ground to the competition from the Lord Admiral's and Lord Strange's Men, who between 1588 and 1594 were using the Theatre and the Rose, and who had a new star actor in Edward Alleyn. The Queen's Men did not survive the great plague of 1593 as a London company; after they 'broke and went into the country to play'<sup>78</sup> in May 1593, they never returned as a group to the metropolis. The plague was a special hazard, since its recurrence was unpredictable and playing was automatically suspended when the deaths per week rose above a certain number (variable in the reign of Elizabeth, but fixed at thirty in the reign of James). A company would then seek to maintain an income by touring in the provinces, though this might not work out; so Henslowe, writing to Alleyn, then on tour, from London in September 1593, reported that Lord Pembroke's Men had returned to London because they could not make enough to cover their costs, and were forced to pawn their wardrobe.<sup>79</sup> A major outbreak of plague, such as occurred in 1593, 1603, 1610, 1625, 1630, and 1636–7, could cause the theatres to be closed for months on end – thirteen in 1603–4, eight in 1625, seven months in 1630, and well over a year between May 1636 and October 1637. The effect on a company could be shattering, as in the case of Pembroke's Men, who, like the Queen's Men, disappear in the 1590s.<sup>80</sup>

A third factor that could interrupt the activities of a company was a restraint on playing brought about by a play that for some reason gave offence, such as occurred with the production of Nashe's lost play *The Isle of Dogs* at the Swan Theatre in 1597 (see above, p. 6); the company concerned, a newly formed Pembroke's Men, left the Swan and regrouped with the Admiral's

<sup>76</sup> Henslowe's *Diary*, p. xxviii; Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 1.44.

<sup>77</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.105–7. <sup>78</sup> Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280. <sup>80</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.130–1.



Men at the Rose when the owner's licence to stage plays at the Swan was revoked. Yet another hazard that could affect the fortunes of a company was fire. The Globe burned down in 1613, when the discharge of guns during a production of *Henry VIII* set fire to the thatched roof. It seems that on this occasion the players were able to save their playbooks and other belongings. The fire at the Fortune in 1621 was more disastrous for the Palsgrave's Men, who lost all their apparel and playbooks.<sup>81</sup> The company never fully recovered, and was ruined when plague halted playing for months in 1625.

The death of a leading actor like Richard Tarlton, or departure of a celebrity like Edward Alleyn, who retired from playing in 1597, could also be a major blow to a company. But if the record of most of the companies is one of instability, playing was also both glamorous and profitable, and puritan and other critics of the stage never ceased to complain that the theatres were crowded while the churches remained empty. During the later years of Queen Elizabeth's reign the companies relied on aristocratic patronage for support, and it was a considerable enhancement of their status when James I took the leading groups under royal patronage after 1603. Two companies, the Lord Admiral's and the Lord Chamberlain's Men, were exceptional in enjoying relative stability and success over a long period. The Admiral's Men became Prince Henry's Men on the accession of James I, and the Palsgrave's or King of Bohemia's company on the death of Prince Henry in 1612. The leading actor of the Admiral's Men, Edward Alleyn, married the stepdaughter of the owner of the Rose, Philip Henslowe; Alleyn himself owned the Fortune,<sup>82</sup> and after he retired from playing (he returned to the stage in 1600, it is said at the request of the Queen), he retained an interest in the company of his friends and former colleagues almost until his death in 1626. It took the burning of their theatre, the loss of their stock, and a bad plague year to cause the company eventually to fail in 1625.

The ties of family and friendship between theatre owner and company were also vitally important in the even longer and more successful career of the Chamberlain's Men, who became the King's Men under James I. James Burbage, who built the Theatre, was the father of Richard, the leading actor of the company. James probably overreached himself financially in 1596, when he bought part of the Blackfriars complex of buildings intending to convert rooms there to a theatre, only to have the Privy Council prevent him from doing so on the petition of local inhabitants (see above, p. 6). James died in 1597, and his two sons, Cuthbert, who took over as administrator, and

<sup>81</sup> Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 1.141; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 546.

<sup>82</sup> *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 302.

Richard, did not have the capital to build the Globe in 1599. They therefore set up a unique arrangement, by which they held one half of the property, with five senior actors in the company each holding an equal share in the other half. In this way sharers in the company became also sharers in the theatre they used. As years passed the personnel of the company changed; Richard Burbage died in 1619, and shares changed hands, but the effect was to consolidate the ownership of the Globe and Blackfriars among the sharers of the King's Men, who controlled the leading company and the principal public and private theatres through the later years of James I and the reign of Charles I.

The most famous Elizabethan actors were of two kinds. One kind were clowns, like Tarlton, Wilson, and Will Kemp. Tarlton and Wilson were noted for their ability to improvise; and Tarlton and Kemp were expert at jigs, the farcical afterpieces with songs and dances popular in the public theatres. A drawing of Tarlton shows him playing on a tabor and pipe (see p. 39), and Kemp is represented dancing on the title-page of *Kemp's Nine Days Wonder* (1600), celebrating the occasion when he danced from London to Norwich.<sup>83</sup> The other kind were heroic actors like Alleyn, famous for creating majestic leading roles, among them the original Tamburlaine, Barabas, and Faustus; and Richard Burbage, who made his reputation in roles like Richard III. Alleyn had ceased to act by 1604 or 1605, but Burbage went on to develop a wide range of roles, including, for instance, Hamlet, Malevole in Marston's *Malcontent*, Othello, and Ferdinand in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. After small indoor playhouses became established with the revival of the children's theatres about 1600, some boy actors began to achieve fame with a different range of characterizations, reflecting changing taste and increasing sophistication.

Their rise to fame is significant because virtually nothing is known of the boys who played all the female roles in plays before 1600. In 1561 Queen Elizabeth had given the Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal power to 'take' children from anywhere in the realm in order to maintain the choir,<sup>84</sup> and the Master in 1600, Nathaniel Giles, abused his prerogative by impressing boys from various grammar schools in London to play in his company as actors. One boy, impressed from St Paul's Grammar School at about the age of thirteen, was Nathan Field, whose education was continued under Ben Jonson, and who became a playwright and an actor of distinction. Alleyn and Burbage probably picked up an education, so far as they had one, on the stage, but Field had been trained in the classics, and was highly literate; he was a leading actor with the Children of the Chapel, which became the

<sup>83</sup> Foakes, *Illustrations*, pp. 44–5, 150.

<sup>84</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.33.



10 Drawing (1608) of the actor John Green as Nobody in the play *Nobody and Somebody*

Queen's Revels company, and then joined the Lady Elizabeth's Men in 1613, finally becoming a sharer in the King's Men about 1616. By this time he was as famous as Burbage, and a collaborator in playwriting with Fletcher, in whose plays he was a noted performer.<sup>85</sup> The evidence suggests he practised a more refined acting style appropriate to the indoor theatres; so in commendatory verses, Field praised Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608) as possessing

Such art, it should me better satisfy,  
Than if the monster clapped his thousand hands  
And drowned the scene with his confused cry.

<sup>85</sup> Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, VI.146.

The two plays Field wrote on his own, *A Woman is a Weathercock* (Queen's Revels, 1609; printed 1612) and *Amends for Ladies* (1611; printed 1618), are comedies the titles of which emphasize the new importance given to women in Jacobean and Caroline drama; the later play turns on the question of which is the best condition for a woman – to be a maid, a wife, or a widow. Other actors who began as boys playing female roles matured into adult players, like Richard Sharpe, who was the first to play the Duchess of Malfi (1613), or Stephen Hammerton, who 'was at first a most noted and beautiful Woman Actor, but afterwards he acted with equal Grace and Applause, a Young Lover's Part', according to James Wright in *Historia Histrionica*, 1699.<sup>86</sup> He created the part of Oriana in the 1632 revival of Fletcher's *The Wild Goose Chase* (1621). Other distinguished adult actors were noted not for a particular strength so much as for ability to play a variety of roles; an example is Richard Perkins (Queen Henrietta's Men), whose name appears in a number of cast lists, and who was praised by Webster in a note appended to *The White Devil* (1612) as an actor whose 'action did crown both the beginning and the end' – here probably in the part of Flamineo.

This same company at the Cockpit/Phoenix had a noted comic actor in William Robbins, who played the changeling, Antonio, in Middleton and Rowley's play of this name (1622). His playing of this role, and that of 'Rawbone, a thin citizen' in Shirley's *The Wedding* (1626), suggests that he was a very different kind of actor from Tarlton or Kemp, a comedian rather than a clown, one whose talents did not lie in singing, dancing, or improvisation, that is, in fooling about and being himself, so much as in performing a variety of character parts. There may be an analogy here with Robert Armin, the leading comedian of the Chamberlain's/King's Men between the departure of Kemp in 1600 and 1610 or so. However, Armin seems to have been skilled as a clown in Tarlton's vein as well as being a comic character actor, and he was succeeded by John Shank, who was more of a clown in the old style. Perhaps the taste for revivals of old plays, and also of new ones on Elizabethan themes in the 1620s and 1630s,<sup>87</sup> was accompanied by a revival of enthusiasm for clowning and jigs. After a complaint about disturbances at the Fortune, an order was issued for suppressing jigs in 1612,<sup>88</sup> but, like so many other orders, it was probably not enforced for long. The fame of Shank, 'John Shank for a jig', was marked in 1632 in

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, II.693.      <sup>87</sup> Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, pp. 185, 198–203.

<sup>88</sup> Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, VI.146; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 543–4.

William Heminges's *Elegy on Randolph's Finger*, line 106,<sup>89</sup> a mock elegy on the loss of his little finger in a fight by the dramatist Thomas Randolph; and since the author was the son of John Heminges of the King's Men, and sold his share in the company to Shank, he knew what he was saying. Other notable comedians of this period were Andrew Cane of Prince Charles's Men, and Timothy Read of the King's Revels and Queen Henrietta's Men, who was gifted as a dancer.<sup>90</sup> It is of some interest that the citizen Thrift in the Praeludium to Goffe's *The Careless Shepherdess* (see above, p. 36), remarks

I never saw Read peeping through the curtain  
But ravishing joy enter'd into my heart.

It seems that Read was still working a trick for which Tarlton had been noted, not only by Henry Peacham (see above, p. 38), but by Thomas Nashe, who recorded in *Piers Penniless* in 1592 how 'the people began exceedingly to laugh, when Tarlton first peeped out his head'.<sup>91</sup>

The business affairs of a company were complex. At first the Admiral's Men relied on Henslowe for help, and the Chamberlain's Men had James Burbage, and after him Cuthbert, to manage matters for them. Later on, actors began to take on administrative roles, as Edward Alleyn did for the Admiral's/Prince Henry's Men at the Fortune, while John Heminges, an actor until 1611 or so, and leading sharer, became full-time manager for the King's Men until his death in 1630. He negotiated performances at court, and dealt with the Master of the Revels in the matter of licensing plays for the stage. Thomas Greene (died 1612) was succeeded as manager of Queen Anne's company at the Red Bull by Christopher Beeston, actor turned manager and entrepreneur; Beeston built the Cockpit in 1616–17, and had a long career successfully manipulating companies to his own advantage at the two theatres in which he had an interest. Another important managerial figure was Richard Gunnell, an actor with Prince Henry's Men, who became a sharer in the new Fortune in 1621, and later at the Salisbury Court theatre, of which he was part-owner.

Little is known about the day-to-day affairs of the companies, but someone had to authorize and organize

the purchase of new costumes and costume materials; paying for new plays by freelance dramatists; getting scripts approved by the Master of the Revels, paying him for licenses for the theatre and for occasional privileges, like playing

<sup>89</sup> Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, II.563.

<sup>90</sup> Foakes, *Illustrations*, p. 158.      <sup>91</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.344.

during parts of Lent; paying the company's regular contributions to the poor of the parish, assessing fines against sharers or hired men for infringement of company regulations; calling rehearsals; collecting fees for court and private performances; supervising the preparation and distribution of playbills; and perhaps for paying the hired men.<sup>92</sup>

It seems to have been customary for sharers to gather to hear a new play read, and decide perhaps on casting; Henslowe laid out 5s. 'for good cheer' at the Sun Inn in New Fish Street when the company met to listen to a new script in 1598.<sup>93</sup> Boy actors were recruited by being apprenticed to sharers, and some, perhaps many, of these boys stayed on after their voices broke to become adult actors or hired men, and were paid a weekly wage to work for a company. The size of the companies has been much debated. Very few cast lists remain, about fifteen printed in the hundreds of published plays, and four in manuscript plays, all dating from 1619 or later;<sup>94</sup> most of these are incomplete. In addition, it is possible to work out much of the casting from the seven surviving dramatic 'plots', or scene-by-scene outlines listing entrances, properties, etc., made for use by the stagekeeper and actors, and presumably posted in the tiring-house during a performance (see p. 46). These outlines date from between 1590 and 1602, and are among the Henslowe-Alleyn documents relating mainly to the Admiral's Men and the Rose theatre.

The matter of the size of the companies has been confused by two considerations. One is the indication, on the title-pages of a number of early play texts printed between 1559 and 1585, of the minimum number of actors necessary to perform the play, usually between four and six.<sup>95</sup> Two later printed plays also have casting indications. The anonymous, and probably old, play *Mucedorus*, first printed 1598, shows how thirteen parts may be played by eight actors (in an enlarged version of 1610 the parts are arranged for ten actors). *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (printed 1602) shows how 'Eleven may easily act this comedy', which has twenty parts in all. The casting directions in early printed plays probably relate to performances by small touring companies. After the professional London theatres became established, the main London companies toured the provinces in times of plague, and although the number in a travelling company is rarely specified in contemporary documents, there could be as many as twenty, as at Plymouth in 1618–19 and at Norwich in 1634, or as few as fourteen.<sup>96</sup> These figures presumably included

<sup>92</sup> Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 147–8.

<sup>93</sup> Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 88; another play was read at an unnamed tavern in May 1602; see p. 201.

<sup>94</sup> Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 218–9.

<sup>95</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, III.179.      <sup>96</sup> Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 184–6.

The platte of The Second parte of  
the Seuen Deadlie Sinnes

A text being glast on the stage for Henry  
the sixth. See in it a fledge of him the Countess  
of Burguonne a Comly the Duke and a wardrobe  
of ~~gold and~~ <sup>rich</sup> ~~clothes~~ <sup>clothes</sup> to them Pride Gluttony  
Wrath and Greediness at one dore at an other  
dore Envy Sloth and Veberry the Tree put  
back the four. and so Exeunt

Henry Ananias! Enter 2. Lagers & similar to him  
a servant T. Bell To him Ligate and the  
Lager. Exit then enter again. Then Envy  
squeals over the drag, Ligate speaks

1. Schrift. Dumb. Bow

After this Confronted w<sup>th</sup> 2<sup>d</sup> Commissioners of Burroughs  
 w<sup>th</sup> Brian w<sup>th</sup> Gualde The Queens Mother and  
 Torrey and som attendants followe November 20<sup>th</sup>  
 Harry of Duke w<sup>th</sup> 2<sup>d</sup> of Bullant & Holland  
 After Confronted was Confronted w<sup>th</sup> his orde be  
 come his 2<sup>d</sup> sent to be Equally parted  
 ending on an other Torrey offered to take Anne his  
 wife & to draw his weapon The King Queen and  
 Lordes fled between them They drew them away  
 w<sup>th</sup> meaning to each other exit The Queens  
 Mother & her 2<sup>d</sup> Equitie & wente fast

after ferres round in Drum and Colliers and Judice  
one way. Harry. R. Cooby fish Duke. to them  
is a not for der. ferres drum and Colliers and stone  
- 10 Dr. R. Ballant fish Sincier A. & Holland.

Enter ~~good~~ Quene. w<sup>th</sup> 2. Comfaiors. m<sup>th</sup> Drin-  
ke. to them. Enter and Parre. feucall m<sup>th</sup>  
w<sup>th</sup> the drums and powerr. Gooddut. entreing in  
the midst between. Henry. Seale

*A Larum w<sup>th</sup> Excursions After  
Night Hawks*

Enter ferrea and Torrea severally Gentle Duke  
With following them Lucius and Damasus in Army

Enter ferrex at one dore. Porrex at an other the  
figgs ferrex is Tawn: to them vidend be Quene  
to Sir Hamadis. to him Lucius.

Enter Dorrex sad w<sup>th</sup> burden his man. Q. P. w<sup>th</sup> to  
to them the Queen and Laodie Nick Samnder.  
And w<sup>th</sup> 2 Conly m<sup>r</sup> Brian. to them Lucius Rmings

Enter Giraldus Pbro. inus Abbatia Pompeia Redy  
Cath. & Gualter. B. G. N. S. 3. 1. 1.

— Sardinapalus Arbustus Nicanor and  
Pulaines marching. m. Philippi m. Type Rta  
Viz. 1. index. 4. 11. 12. 13.

Mr. B. Capitaine 103. Hypatia and the Captives 214

Lidjat Beale

Enter Nicanor w<sup>th</sup> other Apolaines & Gall.  
of Juncos. Cit. of Holland & Conly. to 150m  
Arbush. w<sup>th</sup> Dove to him will full. & Duke  
to 5m. Redpiper. No. 1000. Sardinianus  
Lib. & woman w<sup>th</sup> of Galin Redpiper. Sardinianus  
will full to 150m. Arbush. and 2. w<sup>th</sup> 1000  
w<sup>th</sup> Dove. of Juncos. Vincent & Conly. to 150m  
Nicanor and others. R<sup>th</sup>. Cit.

Enter Jardanapa. W<sup>th</sup> the Ladies to them &  
Messinger. O Godale to him will fade.  
Quintus. A Carum.

Enter Proachus bartering Sardannopolus  
and His V<sup>o</sup> for His Enter Sarda  
what man, Jewels robes and gold as he ca  
carry. Plurum

Enter Tobias Nicobar and 15<sup>th</sup> offer Captain  
in triumph. m. Hope & Pa. m. f. H. A. Con. f. S.  
Henry Speaks and Vidgate Valsey passeth  
sues. Be. S. 1<sup>st</sup>

[illegible]

Enter Eugene Fitz and Vord Samdler with  
A Duke to El Mary.

Inter Philomela and Torus to 13em Julio

Enter Progc Zanzea fms and Lord James  
 T Bell via n<sup>y</sup> Harv B Gadale to them  
 T Crews 10<sup>3</sup> Lords. R Burlodg f Dub R Conly

# Dumb Box. Kidgati speaker

Enter Brogne w<sup>th</sup> the Sampler to her Treasury  
from Hunting w<sup>th</sup> his Vords to them Philomate  
w<sup>th</sup> his w<sup>th</sup> in a dish. Mercury Comes and all  
Tarrifs to him 3 Vords to Goddalt Harry w<sup>th</sup> fly.

Henry speaks to Sir Lieutenant-Pargueson  
and roams to Cook, & Duke, & Holland for  
cinder, to them Warwick. w Brian

Lidgate speaks to the  
Ladies and is  
Drury.

*Amis*

1

11 The 'plot' of Part 2 of *The Seven Deadly Sins* by Richard Tarlton, as played by Lord Strange's Men about 1590; see p. 46

hired men and boys. A second consideration is the question of the doubling of parts. It is evident from early printed texts that plays were constructed with the doubling of parts in mind. As a consequence, there has been a good deal of speculation about doubling, in plays by Shakespeare especially. It has

usually been argued that Shakespeare wrote for between thirteen and sixteen actors throughout his career.

The fact is that there is no necessary connection between the practice of doubling, or the minimum number of actors required, and the size of the company. The professional companies after 1576 staged a number of plays with up to fifty speaking parts. For some of these, the company may have had to rope in everyone available. The 'plot' of *The Battle of Alcazar* (?1598) names twenty-four actors, and that of *1 Tamar Cham* (1602) names twenty-nine, while Peele's *Edward 1* (1591; in production at the Rose 1595–6) has one scene requiring twenty-three players to be on stage. A manuscript play, *The Two Noble Ladies* (Red Bull, 1622), has prompt notes calling for a stagekeeper to come on in non-speaking roles as a guard and a soldier. I suspect it was not often necessary to resort to such expedients, for most of the extant repertory of plays in the period have casts normally of around twelve to fifteen speaking roles, with a few other walk-on parts. In the cast lists in plays published in the 1620s, the King's Men seem to have used between six and eight sharers, about four hired men, and four boys.<sup>97</sup> In playing a daily repertory, the companies needed to protect their leading actors, and the extant cast lists suggest that in the 1620s only half to two-thirds of the sharers, and by no means all the hired men, would perform in any one play. The company at this time was quite large: in 1624, the Master of the Revels listed twenty-one names of hired men, 'musicians and other necessary attendants', as attached to the King's Men, in addition to the eleven principal actors or sharers.<sup>98</sup> The companies had to maintain musicians, keepers of the wardrobe (two were employed at Salisbury Court in 1634), stage-keepers, prompters, and gatherers to collect money at the doors. It is not known whether Herbert's list included all of these, or any of these, but if we set the thirty-three names he gives against the twenty-nine actors recorded for the Admiral's Men in *1 Tamar Cham* twenty years earlier, it looks as though the major London companies each had more than thirty people on the payroll.

The only late cast list for a play with a huge number of parts, at least forty-four, is that in the manuscript of Massinger's *Believe as You List* (1631), in which seventeen members (seven sharers, ten hired men) of the King's Men are named to assigned roles, but a number of roles, including all female parts, have no names attached to them. The doubling for this play was very intricate, and divided some small roles, as well as two sizeable speaking parts, between two, or in one case, that of the character Demetrius, three actors. Such doubling shows little regard for individuality in all but the

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.      <sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65–6.



main roles in plays of this kind. However, this was an exception, and it would have been practicable for a company of about thirty to thirty-five comfortably to maintain a repertory consisting of plays with, as a norm, eight to twelve significant speaking parts. Even so, an actor's life must have been hectic, especially in the 1590s, when the Admiral's and Chamberlain's Men were competing in bringing out a stream of new plays. For instance, in April 1597 the Admiral's Men, playing on twenty-five days out of thirty, performed thirteen different plays; three were new, and two of them were played several times, but five plays were each staged only once.<sup>99</sup> We have no records of the daily repertories later in the period to show whether the custom of presenting a different play almost every day persisted.

There was a temporary explosion in the number of playhouses after 1600, when the children's theatres began to vie with the public stages, and one visitor to London in 1611 said that seven were playing daily.<sup>100</sup> By 1617 the number of companies working regularly stabilized at four (Globe/Blackfriars, Cockpit/Phoenix, Fortune, Red Bull), and the Salisbury Court was added in 1629 to make five. In these later years the companies still competed for the services of the better playwrights, but also used an accumulated repertory of old plays which had stood the test of time, and suited their particular audience. An actor's life may therefore have been less strenuous than in the 1590s. For all their sweat, there was, of course, plenty of glamour and excitement, and we can catch a glimpse of this in Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, played at the Fortune about 1610: in a speech that, as so often in plays of this period, has a double application, Sir Alexander, showing his own mansion to other characters, in fact describes the theatre as if he were playing to a full house:

Nay, when you look into my galleries,  
How bravely they are trimmed up, you all shall swear  
You're highly pleased to see what's set down there:  
Stories of men and women, mixed together,  
Fair ones with foul, like sunshine in wet weather –  
Within one square a thousand heads are laid  
So close that all of heads the room seems made;  
As many faces there, filled with blithe looks  
Show like the promising titles of new books  
Writ merrily, the readers being their own eyes,  
Which seem to move and to give plaudities;  
And here and there, whilst with obsequious ears  
Thronged heaps do listen, a cut-purse thrusts and leers

<sup>99</sup> *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 57–8.

<sup>100</sup> Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.369.

With hawk's eyes for his prey – I need not show him:  
 By a hanging villainous look yourselves may know him,  
 The face is drawn so rarely. Then, sir, below,  
 The very floor, as 'twere, waves to and fro,  
 And, like a floating island, seems to move  
 Upon a sea bound in with shores above. (1.2.14–32)

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