European Theatre Performance Practice, 1580–1750

Edited Book

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Introduction*

This volume presents foundational and representative essays of the last half century on theatre performance practice during the period 1580 to 1750. Explicitly or implicitly, many essay collections on ‘early modern theatre’ focus almost exclusively on London. We contend that it is essential to place Shakespeare’s theatre in its European context. Some of the most illuminating contemporary accounts of the London amphitheatres were provided by cosmopolitan travellers such as the Swiss physician Thomas Platter.1 Similarly, a comparative, geographically balanced account italicizes English theatre itself in new ways. Notwithstanding the importance of amateur theatre in universities, religious institutions, Jesuit and other schools, courts, academies, salons and rhetorical chambers, our main focus is professional theatre. Although France was long held back by the Confrérie de la Passion’s monopoly over theatrical activity in Paris (see Wiley, 1960, pp. 133–57), the rise of year-round professional theatre in England, Italy and Spain occurred more or less at the same time, between about 1560 and 1580. Our selections range from groundbreaking works of the 1960s, such as J.L. Styan’s study of Shakespearean staging and W.L. Wiley and N.D. Shergold’s discussions of French and Spanish theatre audiences, to innovative contemporary considerations of the evolution of Italian or English renaissance acting practice, or ‘hidden’ dimensions of performance, by scholars such as Ronnie Ferguson, Tiffany Stern and Natasha Korda. As such, it complements the treatment of England with essays on the three other major professional theatres of early modern Europe.

A comparative approach is fundamental to early modern performance practice, because both theatrical production (emphasized by the term ‘theatre’) and the literary and dramaturgical dimensions of the play (flagged by the term ‘drama’) can be productively analysed as international systems. There are at least three reasons for this. First, right across Europe, there were playwrights, dramatic theorists, theatre designers, scenic designers, actors and proto-directors engaged in the shared humanist enterprise of excavating, deciphering, interpreting, adapting and transforming the legacy of ancient Greek, and especially ancient Roman theatre. Renaissance responses to ideas of ancient theatre were various, ranging from uncritical subservience to the flexible and often self-justifying use of general principles (Javitch, 1994), to irreverent – but still highly informed – flouting of classical principles, such as Shakespeare’s high-profile violation of the unity of time in The Winter’s Tale or Lope de Vega’s arch demonstrations of his full awareness of the rules infringed by his plays.2 Nowhere can the

* For helpful suggestions and discussions, we thank the editors of the other volumes in this series; also Susanne Greenhalgh and all our friends and colleagues in Theater Without Borders, most especially Michael Armstrong-Roche, Natasha Korda and Eric Nicholson.

1 On Platter’s accounts of theatrical costume and performances in English, Spanish and French theatres (including the Hôtel de Bourgogne), see this volume (Chapter 8, p. 177; Chapter 18, p. 417; Chapter 19, p. 441; Chapter 22, p. 495) and Katritzky (2012, pp. 129–39, 227–8).

2 See Olga Marx Perlzwieg’s translation of Lope de Vega’s El arte nuevo de hacer comedias (Gilbert, 1962, pp. 540–48). On the pervasive influence of humanist theatrical principles by rule-
pervasive impact of classical theatre be seen more clearly than in the idea of the ancient Roman theatrum. As John Orrell explains in Chapter 2, this constitutes the entirely independent but common source of the Roman-style English and French ‘round theatres’ designed for Henry VIII and François I for state events in 1520 – as well as of the Theatre, Brayne and Burbage’s aptly and classically named London public amphitheatre of 1576 (pp. 33–34, 43–44). Second, as the leading edge of humanist inquiry, Italy exerted common if varying influence on the theatres of Spain, England and France, and the German-speaking regions. Italy’s theatrical innovations include the brilliant transfer of ancient Roman comedy to Italian terra firma accomplished by Ariosto, Bibbiena, Machiavelli, Aretino and Angelo Beolco (stage name: Ruzante); the controversial and innovative development of tragicomedy, whether pastoral or not; the flourishing of dramatic theory; the theoretical and practical excavations of the ancient Roman theatrum; the increasing sophistication of scenic technology; the invention of the early modern professional actor and an improvisatory system of theatrical production, and the genesis of opera. These innovations significantly marked early modern Spanish, English, French and (in their wake) Dutch and German theatres. Third, many possibilities for exchange and interaction between these different European vernacular theatre traditions were created by the cross-border travel of itinerant performers and acting troupes; the dissemination of dramatic texts via the new medium of print; the competitive and ‘supranational’ nature of European court culture; and the sheer increased volume of international trade and exchange.3

This collection does not claim to give all areas of early modern theatre performance practice equal prominence. Space for many excellent publications focusing on specialist areas of performance practice could be made only in our references and footnotes. Our selection concentrates on essays offering thick descriptions of actual performance practices, rather than studies exploring, say, the cultural and symbolic resonance of English acting, such as Stephen Greenblatt’s essay on Iago as a self-fashioning figure (1980) or Louis Montrose’s examination of the theatrum mundi trope in the light of the shift from a religious to a secular-based theatre (1980). Many important aspects of performance culture, such as sound and music, spectacle and dance, even court festival (see Chapter 19 by Stephen Orgel),4 are marginalized here to make space for a particular strength of this collection, its inclusion of concentrated essay clusters on thematic topics operating as important connecting tissues.

Certainly Molière and Shakespeare provide two nodes of concentration. Jan Clarke (Chapter 4) surveys Molière’s career – a life in theatre of provincial touring, bookended by extended stays in Paris. Richard Andrews (Chapter 12) identifies the French playwright’s ties with commedia dell’arte actors, Gerry McCarthy (Chapter 17) explores the passions in his theory of acting and both McCarthy and Wiley (Chapter 22) compare the mixed-gender parterre public at Molière’s plays to audiences at English, Spanish and Italian plays. Shakespeare’s playing spaces are considered by John Orrell (Chapter 2), J.L. Styan (Chapter 5) and Robert Weimann (Chapter 6). Costume issues in The Tempest are illuminated by Natasha flouting playwrights such as Shakespeare as well as ‘classicists’ such as Ben Jonson, see Clubb (1989, pp. 3–6).

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4 See also Orgel (1968); Peters (2000); McManus (2002); Savage (2002); Watanabe-O’Kelly (2002); MacNeil (2003); Stern (2004); Treadwell (2007); Munro (2009); Gough (2012); Katritzky (2012).
Korda in Chapter 10, and in *Twelfth Night, Cymbeline, Troilus and Cressida* and *Othello* by Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass in Chapter 8. Rehearsal and acting styles of Shakespearean productions are addressed by Weimann (Chapter 6), Peter Thomson (Chapter 13) and Tiffany Stern (Chapter 14), and Shakespearean audiences by Andrew Gurr (Chapter 18). A third topic cluster concentrates on women and the stage. Unlike the elite amateur women performers noted by Orgel in Chapter 19 (see also McManus, 2002; MacNeil, 2003; Gough, 2012), the presence of professional actresses of the type discussed by Virginia Scott (Chapter 16) and Jane Tylus (Chapter 7) is rarely recorded in Italy or Spain before the 1560s or in France before the 1630s, and only exceptionally in England before the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. However, women contributed to professional performance practice in countless ways. In Chapter 20 Jean Howard examines their impact in theatre audiences, and as Korda points out (Chapter 10), in her study of the often unseen work of women in the production of costumes and costume accessories, it is necessary to enlarge what is understood by ‘theatre production’ if we are to see the full picture – and challenge the received notion – of the ‘all-male stage’.

A fourth substantial cluster focuses on commedia dell’arte-related performance practice, with Ronnie Ferguson (Chapter 11) writing on Angelo Beolco, an important precursor, Scott and Tylus on the actresses of the *Arte* (Chapters 16 and 7 respectively), Andrews and Katritzky on its modular gags and *lazzi* (Chapters 12 and 15 respectively) and Robert Henke on its audiences (Chapter 21). Not least because of its relative lack of playtexts, there is a long tradition, in Italy and elsewhere, of perceptive studies of commedia dell’arte performance practice, especially in relationship to adjacent cultural performances by *piazza* singers and mountebanks. However, until recently, much work on Italian, Spanish and French early modern drama and theatre has addressed performance practice, if at all, with a pronounced bias towards the literary. Along with the groundbreaking work of Bernard Beckerman (1962), J.L. Styan’s book *Shakespeare’s Stagecraft* (1967) ushered in a fertile era of performance criticism in the 1960s. This has continued unabated to the present day, re-energized by the inspiring experimental laboratory created in 1997 by the completion of London’s New Globe. This volume reprints and references publications by many scholars whose work offsets the literary bias with diverse and innovative approaches to performance practice.

### Playing Spaces

The volume’s four sections follow what Andrew Gurr in Chapter 18 has termed the ‘four estates’ of theatrical production. They are ‘Playing Spaces’, including both purpose-built, free-standing structures and spaces adapted for theatrical production, ‘Staging’, ‘Acting’ and ‘Audiences’ (p. 415). A transnational perspective on early modern European playing spaces offers a key to loosening the talismanic hold that the date 1576 has held on the Anglo-American imagination. Burbage and Brayne’s famous name for their purpose-built structure

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in Shoreditch, the Theatre, summons the idea of the ancient Roman theatre that had beguiled European humanists since the late fifteenth century. In the terms of Michael Anderson’s essay (Chapter 1), Burbage and Brayne, like Ben Jonson in the frontispiece engraving to his 1616 Workes, enlisted the Vitruvian use of the word theatre (‘teatrum’), meaning a permanent structure for the production and watching of various kinds of spectacles. But well after the Shoreditch structure was erected and demolished, the term ‘theatre’ retained its etymologically prior second meaning, as ‘a place for viewing’. This double valence means that we should not restrict our purview, in considering early modern European playing spaces, to free-standing, purpose-built structures like Brayne and Burbage’s Theatre of 1576, or its more internationally famous successor, Andrea Palladio’s Teatro Olimpico, completed in Vicenza in 1585 (see Chapter 19, figs 2 and 3). The rigid binaries of permanent/temporary and purpose-built/occasional should yield, in our thinking, to spectra acknowledging that the great Globe itself was only as permanent as fire and Puritan anti-theatrical attacks allowed. The ‘permanent’ perspective scene constructed under Ariosto’s guidance at Ercole I’s court in Ferrara in 1531, when quickly rendered impermanent by fire the following year, was said to have devastated the author of influential European comedies such as La Lena and I suppositi. Orgel’s discussion of the canonical Teatro Olimpico (Chapter 19), and Anderson’s consideration of it in relation to other sixteenth-century Italian playing spaces more commonly known as sale or saloni delle commedia (Chapter 1), help put 1576 in perspective. These spaces include early sixteenth-century Ferraran theatrical structures, the loggia designed (inter alia) for theatrical performance by Giovan Maria Falconetto for Alvise Cornaro’s Paduan court in 1524 and a staging site for several of the actor-playwright Ruzante’s plays (Anderson, Chapter 1, plate 8; Ferguson, Chapter 11, pp. 263, 272) and, in Florence, Bernardo Buontalenti’s sala delle commedie of 1586 and, from 1576, the stanzone delle commedie or Teatro della Baldracca (Anderson, Chapter 1; Henke, Chapter 21).

Considered comparatively, striking dates of confluence between Italian, English and Spanish professional playing spaces emerge. Madrid’s first ‘permanent’ playhouses were the Corral de la Cruz (1579) and the Corral del Principe (1582) (Thacker, Chapter 3; Shergold, 1967, pp. 177–208; McKendrick, 1989). Notwithstanding the importance of securing these more or less permanent playing spaces, the history of professional Spanish playing spaces had already reached its significant turning point by 1568. In this year, the female-run Cofradía de la Pasión, having had the initial idea of constructing a playing space from what was at hand, outfitted a corral playing space between two houses, and became the first licensed sponsor of plays performed in a Madrid corral. Other cofradías or religious brotherhoods followed their lead with the innovative erection of corrcoles. The cofradías leased them to professional theatre groups, who were obliged to donate a portion of their proceeds towards the cofradías’ support of the poor, sick and orphaned (as recorded by Thomas Platter; see Katritzky 2012, pp. 138–39). According to Jonathan Thacker in Chapter 3, Spanish comedia, inscribed into charitable institutions, was less vulnerable to anti-theatrical attacks than English theatre (p. 62). As Walter Cohen wryly notes: ‘for the character and survival of the public theatre, in the end charity was a more effective ally than monarchy’ (1985, p. 166).

The period 1566 to 1568 marks, in Italy, the important use of stanze, or halls in private houses for the groundbreaking virtuosic performances of two actress-led troupes: those of Barbara Flaminia, who thereafter toured the Austrian Habsburg courts, France and Spain with her husband Alberto Naselli (stage name, Zan Ganassa), and Vincenza Armani.
the irregular records of commedia dell’arte performance between 1545, the date of the first extant actors’ contract, and the 1560s mostly refer to piazza and banquet performances, these Mantuan performances, with their pointed references to the star actresses, offer an alternative ante quem for the Italian professional theatre. In 1567, a year before the Madrid authorities licensed the first Spanish corral, and the same year as the peak of Flaminia’s and Vincenza’s virtuosic performance, the London grocer John Brayne erected the first London amphitheatre, the Red Lion in Whitechapel. Its spacious rectangular stage was an important precursor of the deep Globe stage for which J.L. Styan (Chapter 5) has delineated the poetics of upstage and downstage movement.

The year 1576 is of course the year in which, now in partnership with the actor and carpenter James Burbage, Brayne erected his second, much better documented, London amphitheatre, the Theatre in Shoreditch (Orrell, Chapter 2; on London playing spaces, see also Gurr, 1992). As important as 1576 is for English performance practice, it also represents a milestone in the history of Italian playing spaces: the year in which the Florence Customs House or Teatro della Baldracca, which became one of the most important playing spaces in Italy, began offering travelling commedia dell’arte troupes a large playing room on a street teeming with inns and bordellos (Henke, Chapter 21; see also Evangelista, 1980, 1984). Its audiences, as Robert Henke discusses in Chapter 21, were much more socially diverse and more comparable to those frequenting the London amphitheatres than those watching the Italian actors at the nearby Uffizi Palace. The 1580s saw the consolidation of ‘permanent’ playing spaces in Spain initiated by the Corral de la Cruz, the expansion of the London amphitheatres in the era of Kyd and Marlowe, when English professional theatre came of age, the completion of the Teatro Olimpico in 1585, five years after Palladio’s death, and – more importantly for performance purposes – the 1586 construction of the ‘sala delle commedie’ in a hall of the Uffizi Palace in Florence, designed by Bernardo Buontalenti for the production of comedies and opulent intermedii, and noteworthy for its sophisticated scenic devices.

Regarding professional playing spaces, Paris, as we have suggested, was a special case, both belated and characterized by uneven development, because of monopoly and the apparent dearth of available playing spaces. There is activity in its chief theatre, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, in the 1580s when Italian comici and French farceurs act side by side, but little or no theatrical use of it between 1588 and 1598 (Wiley, Chapter 22, p. 495). Among several meticulous studies of French early modern playing spaces, we have selected Jan Clarke’s essay (Chapter 4) for its focus on Molière’s career (see also Lawrenson, [1957] 1986; Golder, 2009; Herzel, 1993; and the very useful collection of documents in Howe, 2000). Molière began performing professionally as a member of the Paris-based Illustre theatre troupe, who followed the practice of the day by renting a former jeu de paume. Over a thousand of these indoor tennis courts were constructed all over Europe from the late Middle Ages onwards, and as the sport waned in popularity, some were permanently or temporarily converted into theatres (Clarke, Chapter 4, fig. 1; Wiley, 1960, pp. 158–77). Having one or two rows of galleries running along three walls, and widely varying size and proportions, but typically with a three-to-one ratio of length to width, they did not make ideal theatres, despite the efforts of theatre companies to fit them out with a stage at one end, and sometimes a raked
amphitheatre opposite it, along the back wall. The venerable Hôtel de Bourgogne itself, drawings for which were discovered by John Golder, followed the long rectangular pattern of the *jeu de paume* even though it may not have originally been built for the purpose (Golder, 2009). As clarified by Jeffery Ravel’s authoritative study (1999), the most important area in most Parisian theatres throughout the Ancien Régime, including converted *jeux de paume* and the Hôtel de Bourgogne, was the *parterre*, covering practically the entire floor area except for the stage, and (where provided) amphitheatre. Here, for the comedies and farces played by French *farçeurs*, or visiting English or Italian actors such as the first Arlecchino, Tristano Martinelli, stood well over half the audience. Jostling, noisy, participatory and socially mixed, these unruly standing spectators were so crucial to the theatre companies, for both ticket income and theatrical energy, that in 1671, when Molière’s company moved into the Palais Royale (Clarke, Chapter 4, figs 5 and 6), a playing space with no *parterre*, he expressly created one. Despite the extreme difficulty that audiences would have had actually seeing what was happening on stage, the narrow, shallow stage of the *jeux de paume* and the Hôtel de Bourgogne played well for farce, with its eavesdropping, asides, discoveries and rapid entrances and exits. As Clarke explains, in plays such as *Le Misanthrope* and *Tartuffe*, Molière initiates the revolutionary movement of departing from the farce street scene and begins to create the illusion of interior space. However, his performance practice is unthinkable without the rich tradition of farce developed by actors such as Gros-Guillaume (Robert Guérin) and Gautier-Garguille (Hugues Guéru) on the inhospitable but socially diverse stage of the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

In our comparative vein, it is worth emphasizing the crucial role that lower-paying, standing audience members played in the three other major European theatres as well: the Globe groundlings, the *mosqueteros* in the corral yards, so important according to Thacker, that Spanish playwrights felt compelled to placate them in their *loas* and prologues (Chapter 3, p. 58); and the *piazza* audiences watching Italian charlatans and other paratheatrical activity who, M.A. Katritzky indicates in Chapter 15, deeply inform the commedia dell’arte. As Clarke makes clear (Chapter 4), the architectural interest of French early modern theatre goes well beyond the *parterre*. T.E. Lawrence’s monumental study ([1957] 1986) shows how haunted the French continually were by what he calls the ‘Italian’ or Vitruvian order. In England, the influence of the Italian, Vitruvian tradition was less problematic and more systematic. Both Stephen Orgel (Chapter 19) and John Orrell (Chapter 2) detail the pervasive international influence of the Vitruvian-Serlian tradition, and the importance of Inigo Jones as a cultural mediator between Italy and England (see also Orgel, 1968). The second book of Serlio’s *Architettura* (1537–51), explicitly addressing theatre and first published in Italy in 1545, was well known in England even before the 1611 publication of the English translation (see also Anderson, Chapter 1, plate 11). Orrell’s exceptionally non-insular essay argues that as early as the 1580s, court theatres such as the Banqueting House of the now otherwise destroyed Whitehall Palace at Westminster, where *Othello* was performed in 1604, displayed signs of Serlian influence. Inigo Jones, who studied the Teatro Olimpico at firsthand in Vicenza, creatively integrated Vitruvian-Serlian elements into English designs. He incorporated them in 1605 into his work on a theatre hall in Christ Church, Oxford, in 1616 at Somerset House, a London space frequently used by the English royal consorts Queen Anna of Denmark and Queen Henrietta Maria, and also at Whitehall Palace’s ‘Cockpit at Court’. Like the Teatro Olimpico, the Cockpit at Court drew from Vitruvius, but became a working theatre in a way the iconic Italian building never did.
Some of these striking commonalities in European playing spaces are attributable to common, ‘top-down’ influence, directly mediated by print and by cultural intermediaries such as the English theatre practitioner Inigo Jones or the Italian acting couple Naselli and Flaminia, who so markedly influenced the early days of the Spanish _comedia_. Many are explained by what the brilliant Italian critic Siro Ferrone (1993) identifies as a convergence of demographic factors: the growth of European cities and the consequent increased circulation of crowds, audiences, currency, culture or even, as Anne Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass point out in Chapter 8, clothing.

**Staging**

As J.L. Styan notes in Chapter 5, Shakespeare’s plays were written for a wide range of venues: outdoor amphitheatres, but also indoor ‘private’ theatres, various court theatres and the indoor halls used by touring companies. The number of plays by Lope de Vega or Calderón uniquely performed in the _corrales_ was proportionally higher than those of Shakespeare and his contemporaries performed only in the London amphitheatres. Even so, as demonstrated by the careers of Naselli and Flaminia, in Italy, professional actors had to adapt their performances to diverse sites, including the court, and in Spain, where they still contributed to cyclical religious plays, successful companies routinely performed in the contrasting venues of court theatres, _corrales_ and open-air sacramental carts (García García, 2003; Ojeda Calvo, 2007).

Staged in the heady early days of the professional Italian theatre, Naselli had performed in the Italian hall (_stanza_), banquet space and _piazza_ in the late 1560s and early 1570s. The _comici_, always itinerant, were masters of flexibility and adaptability, continually performing in new locales, and heavily dependent on costume to establish a sense of place and situation. That the illusion of ‘women at the windows’, as discussed by Jane Tylus in Chapter 7, was often created merely by drawing back a curtain, bespeaks the simplicity and flexibility of commedia dell’arte staging. Before Naselli and Flaminia took their troupe to Spain for a decade-long stay, they played by invitation at the French court, although their attempts to perform in public in Paris at that time were thwarted by the theatre monopoly held by the Confrérie de la Passion, which severely limited the number of officially licensed Parisian performance venues. For many years, these were mostly limited to rectangular _jeux de paume_ buildings, although the most popular French actors and visiting foreign troupes, such as the Gelosi, enjoyed the privilege of performing at court as well as in more socially-mixed sites such as the Hôtel de Bourgogne. However, the very constraints of indoor tennis-court staging — a shallow stage almost overwhelmed by the boisterous _parterre_ audience — seem to have contributed to the Parisian genius for a highly successful Italian-French meld of farce, which, as Richard Andrews argues in Chapter 12, Molière would brilliantly capture on the page.

In Chapter 6 Robert Weimann, like Styan in Chapter 5, tends to minimize the importance of both the ‘inner stage’ or discovery space and the balcony as a superior acting level, instead placing great emphasis and importance on the wide and deep platform, and the complex nexus of meaning achievable by varying positioning and movement across that stage. Because Shakespeare’s theatre was a synthesis of classical and medieval, Styan’s and Weimann’s argument for continuity between the amphitheatre stage and medieval inn-yard stages and pageant wagons does not invalidate Orrell’s point in Chapter 2 about the ancient Roman basis for Brayne and Burbage’s Theatre. Emphasizing the depth of the amphitheatre
stage, stage, Styan discusses the contrasts between grandiloquence and intimacy, remoteness and presence, declamation and whisper of which such a stage is capable. The press of groundlings, comparable to the mosqueteros in the corrales or unruly masses in the French parterre, recalls for Styan the crowds gathering around the mansions and pageants of medieval theatre. The stage’s extraordinary depth allows for extended passages from upstage to downstage, but also for characters to ‘move out of and back into the scene’ (Styan 1967, p. 94). Weimann famously relates the upstage–downstage contrast to the tension, also characteristic of medieval pageant drama, between more illusionistic, localized action in a locus and the non-illusionistic, close actor–audience relationship of the place, or platea. Analysing scenes such as the initial court scene of Hamlet, featuring locus-based Claudius versus platea-based Hamlet, as he utters his asides to the groundlings, Weimann argues that the richness and complexity of Shakespeare’s theatre arises from the play between locus and platea. The commedia dell’arte profited from a comparable creative interplay: between the presentations of virtuoso buffoni or stage zanni working from the tradition of solo or duo piazza or banquet performance, and the new aesthetic of mimesis introduced by professional actresses such as Barbara Flaminia, Vincenza Armani and Isabella Andreini, capable of immersing themselves in the self-enclosed, illusionistic fiction of a two-hour play. Actor-writers defending the professional commedia dell’arte stage from anti-theatrical attacks used this contrast as an ideological point in their attempts to distinguish the new mixed-gender theatre from the old all-male buffoonery. As Tylus points out in Chapter 7, the actress furthermore played a meta-critical function as she observed, commented on and manipulated public piazza or street-based action from her strategic positioning at her private window.

Certainly ‘platform’ critics such as Styan and Weimann do acknowledge the staging role of the discovery space and the balcony – which despite the De Witt drawing was probably more often used for acting than for spectators. Here one can observe a striking similarity between the English amphitheatre stage and the Spanish corrales. Although the Spanish corral did use a central stage door to feature ‘discoveries’ of various sorts, its strategic use of the balcony as an acting area, as when it accommodates the inhabitants of the besieged town in Cervantes’ Siege of Numancia, is comparable to the English amphitheatre use of the balcony, which permits Richard II to declare to Bolingbroke and his troupes below: ‘Down, down I come, like glist’ring Phaëton’.

In Chapters 5 and 6, Weimann and Styan analyse staging in terms of a fruitful interplay between the opposing principles of locus and platea or remoteness and intimacy. In Chapter 7, Tylus sees the actress as simultaneously negotiating two different impulses, the largely indoor, private world, where women are either sequestered or, as frequently occurs in pastoral, unknowingly at risk, and the largely urban, outdoor, public world, successfully managed only by socially compromised female characters such as Ariosto’s Lena, Ruzante’s sullied female protagonists or courtesans diffident about their reputations. Tylus analyses the numerous cases, in Flaminio Scala’s 1611 scenario collection Il teatro delle favole rappresentative, of ‘women at the windows’, as they comment on and intervene in the street-based action below while retaining, unlike the courtesan, a relationship to interior space and a form of individual

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9 c. 27 feet deep by c. 40 feet wide.
10 Reproduced in Chapter 5 by Styan (p. 104) and by Orgel in Chapter 19 (fig. 1).
integrity. The courtesan, Tylus strikingly remarks, ‘has no room of her own’ (p. 159), whereas the canny and skilful actress can deftly negotiate private and public space. As was also largely the case for early modern English theatre and the Spanish *comedia*, the commedia dell’arte set, like those of the crowded French tennis court theatres, could only create the off-stage *fiction* of private space. Relevant in this context is Clarke’s interesting discussion in Chapter 4 of the gradual construction, for Molière’s plays, of an indoor décor created by angle flats and backdrops, in the newly fitted Palais Royale.

Costume and props, the subject of the remaining essays in Part II, ‘Staging’, represent a rapidly expanding field of enquiry currently producing much innovative work. Some aspects not represented here are touched on elsewhere in this volume, as when Spanish stage costume is considered by Thacker (Chapter 3) and French stage lighting by Clarke (Chapter 4), and pioneering studies on others, such as lighting (Graves, 1981, 2009) and make-up (Drew-Bear, 1981), are published in the 1981 issue of *Renaissance Drama*, a journal with a strong tradition of exploring visual elements of performance. Jones and Stallybrass’s well-known collaborative work on costume in early modern English theatre identifies the importance of costumes as vital performance ‘texts’ in their own right. As they note in Chapter 8, costumes often take precedence over actors, sometimes even dictating production schedules, and, as the major financial investment of many theatre companies, ‘retained their value better than plays’ (p. 165). Widely viewed as an affront against gender identity and social hierarchy, the performative display of cross-dressing and aristocratic clothing by the common players, who were little more than a liveried costume away from being taken as vagabonds, understandably elicited the ire of the anti-theatricalists. The improvisations of the English clown and the Italian *comici* could be considered a kind of verbal *quodlibet* or ‘stitching together’, and a common attack of anti-theatricalists was that the players’ use of secondhand, stitched together clothing perfectly matched the composite, chaotic nature of their minds. Even the modular nature of early modern European performance is based on a patchwork approach of combinatory modules, or ‘theatergrams’, as Louise George Clubb (1989) terms them, whether they are the gags or *lazzi* discussed by Andrews and Katritzky (Chapters 12 and 15, respectively), Arlecchino’s patched rags or the minute spangles, beads and other accessories illuminated by Natasha Korda in Chapter 10. Concentrating on the production of such diminutive costume accessories, this contribution to Korda’s ongoing recovery of the contribution of women to the ‘all-male’ stage emphasizes the challenges of its often hidden nature (see also Korda, 2008).

Andrew Sofer, whose work on props ranges from the general (Sofer, 2009) to the particular (Chapter 9), argues that in late sixteenth-century England, after a deeply unsettling series of religious changes, sacred objects such as the host, Christ’s shroud and ecclesiastical garments no longer carried their traditional force in an institutional setting, but were appropriated by the secular theatre for their vestigial inherent power: emotional and semiotic. The argument is consonant with Louis Montrose’s discussion (1980), following Keith Thomas, of ways in which the new rites of the professional theatre represented crucial life-passages and appealed to a public who still carried collective memories of the old sacraments. Stephen Greenblatt,
in *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001) and other works, similarly explores this vein. For Sofer, the circulating handkerchief in Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* is no ‘demystified idol’; it draws from its prior religious power but has now become a fetish prompting revenge.\(^{15}\) Repeatedly citing Greenblatt, Sofer recalls the new historicist discussions of Montrose (1980) and Mullaney (1988, 2006, pp. 71–89) on the theatre’s secular appropriation of deinstitutionalized, but still resonant religious meaning. Roberto Tessari (1981) discusses the mountebank and charlatan performers in the Italian *piazza* in a similar light. For him, the new professional performers of the sixteenth century operate in the aftermath of the sacred contract between the holy man and the devout faithful, the divine mendicant and the devoted almsgiver. In a secular transaction trading on vestigial aura, the itinerant charlatan bases his relationship with his public no longer on ‘faith, charity, and the hope of traditional religion, but rather on a faith in a commercial relationship, on an illusion of felicity’ projected by the performer (Tessari, 1981, p. 40). In Chapter 3 Thacker touches on the very different situation of Spain’s professional actors, who performed in *auto sacramentales* and other liturgically-based drama as well as commercial secular plays (p. 60).

**Acting**

Alan Downer’s 1943 survey of eighteenth-century acting styles is foundational, and illuminating insights into early modern acting have been provided by specialists from many different disciplines.\(^{16}\) Renaissance playwrights and actors were habitually drawn to ‘modular’ conceptual categories such as the ‘character’ discussed by Peter Thomson in Chapter 13, the rhetorical topoi that organized their commonplace books or the schematic ‘plots’ that guided acting practice.\(^{17}\) As Thomson notes, such plots were a resource for improvising author-actors requiring frameworks for commedia dell’arte scenarios, but also for English actors in aristocratic households preparing to negotiate four or five roles each. Some performative modules could easily be assimilated into scripted drama, as Richard Andrews (Chapter 12) shows for the ‘elastic gags’ he identifies in the commedia dell’arte and their use by Molière. Such modular scenes, which may have grown out of illiterate actors’ improvisations but were brilliantly translated to the page by Aretino, Molière and Shakespeare, reflect a persistent orality in early modern theatre performance cutting across linguistic borders, and informing each of our four European theatres. Transnationally disseminated by print culture as well as by the players themselves, such modules include verbal virtuosities, but also medical and magical set-pieces arising from the extensive collaborations between actors and charlatans (see Katritzky, 2007; Theile and McCarthy, 2013), and physical theatre of the kind recorded by Hippolytus Guarinonius in 1610. As discussed by M.A. Katritzky in Chapter 15, this Italian physician’s German-language descriptions of some three dozen *lazzi*, or theatre routines, draw on his memories of *piazza* commedia dell’arte performances seen as a medical student in Padua in the 1590s (see also Katritzky, 2012, pp. 317–37). The most detailed of Guarinonius’s

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\(^{15}\) On Othello’s handkerchief, see Jones and Stallybrass (Chapter 8, pp. 193–94); Yachnin (1996).

\(^{16}\) See Weimann (1978, pp. 224–37); Holland (1984); Peters (2000); Wofford (2008); Brown (2012).

\(^{17}\) On the written *scenari* (plot outlines) and *zibaldone* (actors’ commonplace books) of the ‘improvised’ commedia dell’arte, see Henke (2002); Ojeda Calvo (2007); Perrucci (2008).
texts minutely describes comic stage routines revolving around the human body, acrobatics and scatological humour, offering rare insights into physical, non-verbal aspects of the commedia dell’arte’s earliest ‘theatergrams’.

Both improvising actors and script-based playwrights could detach and recombine verbal modules in endless combinations, especially in the forms of intertextual allusions to famous authors, such as the bits of Machiavelli identified by Michael Redmond (2009) in early modern English drama, or the snatches of Florio’s bilingual language learning texts embedded in Act I of The Taming of the Shrew. Cognitive philosophers such as George Lakoff and Mark Turner (1980) would argue that modular and schematic categories, if inflected by culturally specific locales, are intrinsic to human consciousness itself. Although modularity is by no means specific to early modern drama or even early modern thinking, the period’s modular theatrical units were rendered particularly conspicuous, nameable and public by both the humanist rhetorical training that shaped early modern playwrights across Europe as a ‘deep source’ and the improvisatory memory systems then used by Italian actors and English clowns who ‘composed’ on stage.

For Peter Thomson, in Chapter 13, the ‘characters’ performed by early modern actors were nothing like Stanislavskian subjectivities but took their context from action and situation; they were defined oppositionally in the network of a character system. The overwhelming influence of ancient New Comedy on European drama produced striking continuities of character system across the European theatre – the senex/old man, whether as Polonius, the Spanish barba, Pantalone or Molière’s miser, is ubiquitous. Tiffany Stern’s observation in Chapter 14 about the central constraints of theatre production in London – a relatively small city that therefore required continual novelty in play offerings – can also be extended to the Spanish and French situation. It is even relevant to the Italian troupe, because although they regularly travelled, they were installed in a given court for significant periods of time and thus had to keep producing what at least had the appearance of novelty. To perform, as the Lord Admiral’s Men did in 1594–95, thirty-eight plays, including twenty-one new plays, within a single year was greatly expedited by the system of typecasting described by Stern. A fortiori, modular or generic character arrangements drove commedia dell’arte troupe, who could produce a ‘new’ play with very little improvisation time largely because each character, as Andrews describes in Chapter 12, had his or her own repertoire of typical speeches, gags and routines to be inscribed into the given plot under the coordination of the corago. Similar proto-director playwrights coordinated the action in England, Spain and France. There is considerable overlap between the characters populating Italian and Spanish comedy, and Stern’s list of English character types – ‘fat jolly men’, ‘lean melancholic men’, knights, kings, braggarts, clowns and the ‘well-meaning but misdirected old man … Polonius’ (pp. 334–35, 344). There would not have been that much difference between ‘preparing one’s part’ from a scroll of cues and lines in England, Spain or France, or from a written scenario pegged up backstage in Italy. Significantly in this context, many of the lines in Shakespeare’s comic scenes were improvised (Grewar, 1993). Only the modularity or recurrent character types and ‘theatergrams’ of situation made it possible for Lope de Vega to write – and for his actors to act – a new play roughly every three to four weeks.

Significant changes, if not linear evolution, which may be studied in the conception of stage-enacted ‘passions’ between the time of Shakespeare and the eighteenth century, are analysed in Joseph Roach’s foundational book (1985). The extremely nuanced codification of
passions and speech acts to be found in Isabella Andreini’s *Frammenti* and Andrea Perrucci’s 1699 *Dell’arte rappresentativa, premeditata ed all’improviso* (2008) coheres with the enacted passions of early modern English theatre, discussed by Stern. With regard to both their onset and their capacity for serial change, the suddenness of English stage passions, emphasized by Stern, are comparable to the lovers’ passions in the commedia dell’arte, and those of revenge and jealousy in the Spanish *comedia*. All were closely tied to gestures which, as indicated by Hamlet’s speech to the players, could be played formulaically or with great skill and nuance. Actors preparing their roles scanned their parts, argues Stern in Chapter 14, to locate the different passions that they would be enacting.

In their different ways, the conception of passion bound body and mind in both the theatre of Molière and in eighteenth-century performances. Gerry McCarthy, in his discussion of Molière (Chapter 17), argues that the concrete physical forms displayed in the gestures, facial expressions and movements of the impassioned actor were perceived to exercise the *moral* sense of the spectator. Gesture, in Molière, becomes the embodiment of ethical character. As Roach (1985) suggests, if Molière’s gestures and passions are still keyed to a system of macrocosmic correspondences, David Garrick uncoupled passions from transcendent links, conceiving the actor’s energy as like electrical fire. ‘Spirit’ emerges from a specific configuration of matter, not vice versa. Applying eighteenth-century scientific theories of body and mind to eighteenth-century acting, Roach interestingly addresses ‘sensibility’ in terms closer to those of twenty-first-century neurology than traditional moral discourse.

According to Peter Thomson (Chapter 13), exceptional trailblazers provide atypical reflections of actual contemporary practice. Great innovators of early modern European acting such as Richard Burbage or Ruzante appear to have edged acting towards a more ‘naturalistic’ style. In Chapter 11 Ronnie Ferguson makes a strong case that Ruzante, both as playwright and as actor, fundamentally influenced the previously ‘logocentric’ Italian acting practice of erudite comedy, introducing a rich language of the body and calibrating verbal texts designed to synchronize effectively with performance texts of the moving, gesticulating, grimacing actor’s body. Ruzante, Ferguson suggests, revolutionized Italian performance practice through his innovative multimedia mastery of song, dance, mime and instrumentation, his staging of complex group movement, his exploitation of stage space and brilliant use of noises and imagined actions off-stage, his physical foregrounding of the performing actor and his melding of word and gesture. Perhaps the most significant factor in this process was the introduction of actresses, and we include Virginia Scott’s important essay on the rise of the professional actress in sixteenth-to-eighteenth-century Italy and France (Chapter 16). Like Tylus (Chapter 7), Scott interrogates a tension animating the actress. For her, this tension reflects the interplay between the ‘virtuous’ actress as codified above all by Isabella Andreini, and the claim and appeal of ‘volupté’: the model of actress-as-courtesan that, she argues, finally came to hold sway from the theatre of Racine and Molière into the eighteenth century.

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18 For excellent selections from Andreini’s *Frammenti*, see Marotti and Romei (1991). On Spanish character types and stage passions, see Oehrlein (1993); Cuadros (1998).
19 *Hamlet*, III.ii.1–45 (Shakespeare, 1997, pp. 1209–10).
20 On orality and multi-linguality on Italian stages, see Henke (2002); Jaffe-Berg (2009).
Audiences

Early modern theatre actors, according to Weimann in Chapter 6, ‘performed not so much for an audience as with a community of spectators’ (p. 128). The socioeconomic class and gender make-up of spectators varied according to playing spaces, which ranged from the street to the court in all four major European theatres. Taking into consideration every type of English and mainland performance venue, the class, wealth and gender of audiences varied greatly. The standing spectators important in each theatre, whether English groundlings, Spanish mosqueteros, French parterre spectators or Italian piazza audiences, represent a wide social range. As Andrew Gurr demonstrates in Chapter 18, theatre spectators have to be considered carefully and on a decade-by-decade basis, with no unscrutinized assumptions about neatly divided audiences or ‘rival traditions’ (p. 433). It is possible to generalize, says Gurr, that upper, middle and artisan classes patronized the Globe, and that the middle and lower-middle classes could not have attended the expensive private theatres, but even there we find exceptions, such as Ben Jonson’s ‘six-penny mechanic’ and ‘shop’s foreman’, who have paid their way into Blackfriars (p. 419). Gurr takes care to distinguish between the periods preceding the King’s Men’s purchase of the Blackfriars theatre in 1608–1609, and following it, when the indoor theatre appears to rise gradually in prominence relative to the Globe. Throughout the entire pre-Restoration period of professional English theatre, from the 1570s to the closing of the theatres in 1642, court theatres represented important performance venues, which, as described by Orgel (Chapter 19), developed a symbiotic relationship with their audiences.

As Robert Henke discusses in Chapter 21, such theatre–audience mirroring also governs the actor–audience relationship in the courtly and academic commedia erudita, which is contrasted to the exchange between spectator and commedia dell’arte actor performing in very different sorts of venues: the piazza, the inn room, the public stanza, the aristocratic hall, the banquet room and the court. In Chapter 22 W.L. Wiley provides a thick description of the notoriously boisterous, noisy and frequently violent parterre spectators of the Hôtel de Bourgogne watching plays in the same room as aristocrats and gentlemen, whose wealth enabled them to choose freely between the cheap parterre and the expensive loges. N.D. Shergold demonstrates, in Chapter 23, that in Spanish theatres, just as in London, the inclusion of a significant plebeian strain among the mosqueteros, or standing public, did not exclude the presence of nobility in the privileged gallery seats. The prominence of standing auditors in all four theatres, and the overall social range of the audience, generated much noise: the nut-cracking Globe spectators described by Gurr; a Hôtel de Bourgogne audience loud enough to have elicited pleas for silence in several playwrights’ prologues; the ‘continual din of Florentine youth’ noted by Henke (p. 484) at the Baldracca theatre; and the whistling, key-jangling women in the cazuela section of the Spanish corrales.

Our chosen essays on audiences examine all four major European theatres and address the new position of women as spectators, as well as actresses. According to Jean Howard (Chapter 20), demonstrably increased numbers of female spectators of varied social range drew warnings by anti-theatricalists like Stephen Gosson, concerned especially that women auditors, unleashed into the public traffic of theatre, become the ‘object[s] of promiscuous gazing’ (p. 475). Reading past the surface of paternalistic masculine ideology, which instinctively relegates women to passive roles, Howard argues that the stronger, unspoken fear was not that
female spectators were gazed upon, but that they themselves could be the agents of seeing, judgment and negotiation into the public arena. Writing about a seventeenth-century theatre well documented in image and word for the ubiquity and numbers of female spectators, Wiley (Chapter 22) indicates another interesting way in which women exercised ocular control in a public arena: by wearing masks, as the ostensibly less virtuous debauchees in attendance did not. Women constrained to the Spanish cazuela nevertheless were hardly passive spectators, joining the mosqueteros in that international form of dramatic criticism, whistling and hissing their disapproval of the actors. In Chapter 18, Gurr notes women’s important function as arbiters of taste in 1630s England, the era of Henrietta Maria, characterized by play titles such as The Lady’s Privilege and The Lady’s Trial.

The new, sensational actress positively ruled Italian stages: from the piazza platforms deployed by female acrobats and cantimpanche, to the Florentine hall where Isabella Andreini and Vittoria Piisimi mesmerized the select audience gathered for the marriage of Christine of Lorraine to Duke Ferdinando de’ Medici in 1589.1 The effect of these new actresses on their audiences seized the interest of both mainland anti-theatricalists, no less prevalent and copious than their English counterparts, and defenders of the theatre. Despite their opposing positions on the actress, both factions agreed on the astonishing power the new stage divas held over the hearts, minds and senses of their audiences (Brown, 2012). What emerged in the actress debate, and in exchanges about commedia dell’arte performance, is the idea that the mute eloquence of theatrical spectacle is all the more powerful for simultaneously working on several sensory fronts: aural, visual, even almost tactile, in the sense that the aural and visual signals of the melodious and voluptuous actress were thought to have something akin to physical force.

In assessing the nature of audience response, and of playing spaces, staging and acting, the other ‘three estates’ of theatrical performance considered here, it is important to amass as many perspectives as possible. Anti-theatrical speculations on audience response and theatre behaviour, as Andrew Gurr warns us, must be triangulated against other sources and opinions. So too, in this volume we have gathered essays representing a wide geographical swathe of early modern performance practice on either side of the Channel that, we hope, will both reveal surprising commonalities and throw into relief salient differences.

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