"A small-beer health to his second day": Playwrights, Prologues, and First Performances in the Early Modern Theater

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Studies in Philology, Volume 101, Number 2, Spring 2004, pp. 172-199 (Article)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/sip.2004.0010*

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by Tiffany Stern

"LET fancy," shrugs the prologue to George Powell's *Alphonso* (1691), "save my Play, / And then I'll laugh at Wits on my *Third Day*."[1] What he is saying is that he hopes the audience will accept his play by applauding it. Provided they do so, *Alphonso* will be put on at least another two times; if the reverse happens and it is "damned," it will never be staged again. Powell is particularly anxious that the play survive to its third performance, as he will be given a portion of the revenue brought in that night for his "benefit." This will be the major (and perhaps only) payment he gets for his writing. The prologue, as is clear, is for the play only in its early stage-life, angled toward that audience who will determine the production's survival to the benefit. This prologue and the wishes it expresses are entirely standard, and it is usual to point out the three-day nature of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prologues.[2]

But despite the fact that many Caroline and some Jacobean prologues and epilogues deal with the same issues—the role the audience will have in applauding or damning the play, the playwright's fears and desires for his "benefit" performance—no critics have drawn attention to this, or dealt with its corollary: that many surviving prologues and epi-

[1] George Powell, *Alphonso* (1691), A4[a].

[2] See, for instance, Jocelyn Powell, *Restoration Theatre Production* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 16; Paulina Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 40. In 1712 *The Spectator* recorded that "Contrary to all other Epilogues, which are dropp'd after the third Representation of the Play, this [the Epilogue to Ambrose Philips's *The Distressed Mother*] has already been repeated nine times." See *The Spectator*, ed. Donald R. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 3:266.

logues in the early modern period were also temporary and the province of the opening day only (benefit performances, when held, generally took place on the second day up until the interregnum). Plays, I will argue, were differently packaged on their first performance from the way they were subsequently packaged; printed plays with and without prologues are making different statements. This article will show how prologues and epilogues affected the way a play was seen and marketed; it will show stage-orations referring to their first day status, referring to the "judgmental" audience in a position to damn the play, and referring to second-day authorial benefits to come. The suggestion also will be made that new plays (with prologues and epilogues) might be cut in the light of criticism received from the audience at the first, or "trial," performance. The chronology of playing is more pertinent to the argument than the chronology of publication; dates given for plays in square brackets are dates of performance.[3]

PROLOGUES, EPILOGUES, AND THE FIRST PERFORMANCE

It has always been clear that some prologues and epilogues were written for special single performances: those, for instance, addressed to "Ezekiel Fen at his first Acting a Mans Part" or addressed to "their two excellent Majesties, at the first Play play'd by the Queenes Servants, in the new Theater at White Hall."[4] All prologues to the court are, of course, for specific one-off performances. But although many other prologues and epilogues show distinct signs of being highly topical—the prologue to Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, for example, makes articles of agreement between the spectators at the Hope theater and the author on "the one and thirtieth day of *Octob*. 1614"—critics have not considered that most surviving prologues and epilogues may have been for special first-day performances.[5] Particularly when writing about Shakespeare, critics have assumed prologues and epilogues were perma-

[3] Dates of performance are taken from Alfred Harbage and S. Schoenbaum, *Annals of English Drama: 975–1700* (London: Methuen, 1964). Because prologues and epilogues cannot necessarily be assumed to be contemporary with the plays they sandwich, however, as copious a range of examples and dates as possible will be given in the footnotes to support any point made.

[4] Henry Glapthorne, *Poems* (1639), 28; Thomas Heywood, *Pleasant Dialogues and Dramas* (1637), in *Dramatic Works*, collected by Richard Herne Shepherd, 6 vols. (London, 1874), 6:339. See also epilogues referring to particular players—like Philip Massinger's *Emperor of the East* or Heywood's Prologue to the revised *Jew of Malta*—that are relevant only at very specific stages of the performers' careers.

[5] Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52), 6:15.

nently part of the text, though history shows that even prologues sharing close thematic links with their plays seem to have been disposable.[6] The scene-setting prologue to Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* ("In Troy there lies the Scene") is a case in point: it had not featured in either of the variant first Quartos (1609) of the text, and it was almost accidentally acquired for the Folio late in the publication process to fill what had, for other reasons, become a spare recto before the start of the play.[7] Similarly, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* appears in the Folio without its "star-crossed lovers" prologue; *Henry V* in its 1600 Quarto (thought to be, albeit in corrupt form, a performance text) is without prologue or chorus; while in the Folio text (thought to have its origins in foul-papers) the audience is asked "Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play" —a typical first-performance request.[8] Of the Shakespeare plays that exist in more than one text, most simply do not have stage-orations at all; of those that do, variant texts often exist without them. Thus, setting aside apologies for new actors, new theaters, or royalty, it is obvious from reading en masse all prologues and epilogues of the period that most are, like their Restoration counterparts, for new plays and, more specifically, for new plays before their benefit performance.

PROLOGUES, EPILOGUES, AND NEW PLAYS

The specific link between new play and prologue is casually referred to in a 1614 text that describes an epistle to the reader as being "as ordi-

[6] For the argument that epilogues "[accommodate] the passing fiction to some sense of the actual circumstances of its production and reception" (98), see Robert Weimann, "Performing at the Frontiers of Representation: Epilogue and Post-Scriptural Future in Shakespeare's Plays," in *The Arts of Performance in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama: Essays for G. K. Hunter*, ed. Murray Biggs (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 96–112. It is usual to read the epilogue to *The Tempest* as an important feature of Prospero's character. To pick just one instance, in *Late Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 261–62, Simon Palfrey discusses the epilogue as a comment on the way Prospero continues to be haunted by Caliban. Similarly, Rosalind's epilogue to *As You Like It* is often seen as a telling reflection on devices in the play, particularly the playwright's comment on the reversibility of gender roles. See Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 132–33.

[7] See Peter W. M. Blayney, *The First Folio of Shakespeare* (Washington, DC: Folger Library Publications, 1991), 21.

[8] It has been argued that the compositors of the Folio text for *Romeo and Juliet*, which is set from Quarto 2 (1599), omitted the prologue by mistake. See Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor et al., *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 375–77, for the suggestion that when casting off, someone in the print house forgot to turn back to the page that contained the prologue. But this is hard to believe: with the prologue, the play is heralded as a tragedy from the outset; without it, the play is comic until the death of Mercutio.

nary before a new Book, as a *Prologue* to a new Play."[9] The point is made in reverse some years later, when James Shirley writes of his disinclination to give a prologue to an old play (though actually new prologues for first performances of revivals were common): "A Prologue you expect, we ask'd for one, / Our Poet said twas old, and should have none."[10] The impermanence of prologues and epilogues suggested by their treatment seems to be associated with the purposes they served when spoken. One purpose—originally the main function of the epilogue—was to determine whether the audience had accepted the play and were prepared to applaud it. Indeed, the Renaissance epilogue had its roots in the "plaudite" of the plays of Terence and Plautus, in which the concluding words of the actor were *plaudite*, *valete et plaudite*, or *plausum date*, a demand that the spectators clap their hands.[11] When this mattered was in the first performance, for it was then that a final verdict would be reached on the play. Years later Thomas Dibdin described "passing censure" and explained how the audiences of 1827 were asked, at the end of a first performance, to permit the play to be performed again. Cries of "ay" and "no" provided the answer.[12] Remarkably late as this example is, early modern epilogues demonstrate exactly the same procedure. As the epilogue to Walter Mountfort's *Launching of the Mary* begs [1633],

> Yf then this please (kinde gentlemen) saye so
> Yf yt displease affirem yt wth your No.
> your, I, shall make yt liue to glad the sire
> your, No, shall make yt burne in quenchles fire.[13]

The Bardh who speaks the epilogue to R. A.'s *Valiant Welshman* [1612] gives yet earlier confirmation for the same process: he fears he may be sent to his tomb, but he hopes instead to be able to give "second birth" to the play; finally he acknowledges, "Bells are the dead mans musicke: ere I goe, / Your Clappers sound will tell me I, or no."[14] "Ay" or "no," given either verbally or with claps or hisses, is what the audience are asked to

[9] Christopher Brooke, *Ghost of Richard the Third* (1614), $4\pi^{b}$.

[10] Shirley, *Poems*, in *Dramatic Works and Poems of James Shirley*, ed. William Gifford, 6 vols. (London, 1833), 6:495.

[11] George Spenser Bower, *A Study of the Prologue and Epilogue* (London, 1884), 8.

[12] Dibdin, *The Reminiscences of Thomas Dibdin*, 2 vols. (London, 1827), 1:7.

[13] Mountfort, *The Launching of the Mary*, ed. John Henry Walter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 124.

[14] R. A., *The Valiant Welshman* (1615), $I4^{b}$. See also "On Christ-Church Play at Woodstock," in Richard Corbet, *Certain Elegant Poems* (1647), 71: "If we . . . have not pleased those, / Whose clamorous Judgments lie in urging No'es."

provide; epilogues requesting approval are written to be spoken during the time when a play's outcome is still uncertain (the "second birth" referred to by the Bardh is a second performance).

In different forms, the same question is repeatedly asked in epilogues from the Elizabethan period onward: will the play be "approved" so that it can be shown again, or will it be "damned" so that its first performance will also be its last? Not knowing the answer, the insecure texts harp on the fearful sounds of disapproval—the snake's or goose's hiss, the cat's meow. One 1599 Epilogue commits himself to his fortune, "contented to die, if your severe judgements shall judge me to be stung to death with the Adders hisse."[15] Many clearly state the fact that they are the preserve of new plays specifically—"Our Play is new . . . 'tis in your powers, / To make it last; or weare out, in two houres" [c. 1625–34], says one; "if yee dislike the Play," says another, "Pray make no words on't till the second day . . . be past" [1641?].[16] The same point is made in a variety of other ways, frequently with a focus on the power of the audience on this specific occasion.[17] When the Epilogue to Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* gloomily prognosticates that "ten to one" the play will not please all the assembled spectators, he means that he does not yet know whether the play will take. He is matched by contemporary and later Epilogues, all also wondering whether or not their play will gain acceptance.[18]

[15] Henry Porter, *The Two Angry Women of Abington* (1599), A2^{b}.

[16] Heywood, *A Maidenhead Well Lost* (1634), in *Works*, 4:165; Sir John Denham, *The Sophy* (1642), A2^{a}. Plenty of other epilogues are phrased in terms of a particular judgment not yet made. See Shirley, [*Love Tricks or*] *The School of Complement* (1631), in *Works*, 1:97: "we attend / To know if your acceptance crown the end" [1625]; Nathaniel Richards, *The Tragedy of Messallina* (1640), F8^{a}: "what your censures are, / If with, or against Arts industrie . . . We know not yet, 'till judgement give us ease" [1634–36]; William Habington, *The Queen of Aragon* (1640), I3^{b}: "may / You gently quit or else condemne the Play" [1640]; Richard Brome, *The Court Beggar*, in *Dramatic Works*, 3 vols. (London, 1873), 1:270: "Ladyes, . . . Tis in you to save / Him [the poet], from the rigorous censure of the rest" [1639–40]. Prologues and epilogues that mention specifically that they precede the second performance are listed later in this paper.

[17] Philip Massinger, *Believe as You List*, in *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger*, ed. Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 3:390: "whether you / conceave wee have wth care dischargd whate*s* due / reste*s* yet in supposition" [1631]; Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Little French Lawyer*, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, ed. Fredson Bowers et al., 10 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 9:426: "I [Epilogue] am sent forth to enquire what you decree / Of us and our Poets" [1619–23]. See also their *The Chances*, in *Dramatic Works*, 4:629: "Our paines were eas'd, / Could we be confident that all rise pleas'd" [1613–25]; Brome, *The Love-sick Court*, in *Works*, 2:171: "Tis not the Poets art . . . / Can justly make us to presume a Play / Is good till you approv't" [c. 1639–40]; Heywood, *A Challenge for Beauty* (1636), in *Works*, 5:79: "your Smile or Frowne, / Can save, or spill; to make us swimme, or drowne" [1634–36].

[18] See, for instance, Edward Sharpham, *Cambridge Cupid's Whirligig* (1607), L3^{b}: "for the

Prologues, too, address head-on various first-performance themes. They also dwell on the freshness, youth, and novelty of the play they are presenting; "new" is the word they fixate on. "*THe* DIVILL *is an* Asse," declares a Jonson Prologue (1631), "*That is, to day*, / *The name of what you are met for, a new Play*" [1616]; the Prologue to *Arviragus and Philicia* is providing "a new Play" as "promis'd . . . by our bill" [1635–36]; the Prologue of *The Platonic Lovers* (1636) expresses the hopeful desire that "because 'tis new / 'Twill take" [1635].[19] And lewd jokes used by prologues and epilogues alike are variations on a variety of youthful "first-timer" themes. It was usual to describe a play as a child hoping to mature; more bawdily it might be likened to a maid because it was as yet "untouched" (by criticism). Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* [1613–16] compares new plays to maidenheads, while the Epilogue to Fletcher's *A Wife for a Month* [1624] describes how his play is "a Virgin yet."[20] So stage-orations broadcast that they are written for special kinds of occasional performance, to accompany, as the more salacious ones imply, raw texts in their untampered state.[21]

And, of course, the threat of first-performance damnation was no idle one: there are plenty of examples of plays condemned on the opening

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children ere I goe, / Your censure I would willing know" [1607]; Henry Glapthorne, *Wit in a Constable* (1640), $A4^a$: "Are you resolv'd yet Gentlemen?" [1636–38].

[19] Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, 6:163; Lodowick Carlell, *Arviragus and Philicia* (1639), $A3^a$; Sir William Davenant, *The Dramatic Works of Sir William Davenant*, ed. James Maidment and W. H. Logan, 5 vols. (London, 1872), 2:6. See also Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, in *Dramatic Works*, 5:303: "We have a Play, a new Play to play now, / And thus low in our Plaies behalfe we bow" [1619?]; Massinger, "Prologue at the Blackfriars" to *Emperor of the East* (1632), in *Plays and Poems*, 3:407: "Our Author with much willingnes would omit / This Preface to his new worke" [1631]; Nathaniel Richards, *The Tragedy of Messallina* (1640), $B1^b$: "the Play . . . is new" [1634–36]; Thomas Nabbes, *The Bride* (1640), $L1^b$: "Some . . . Because this *new Play* hath a *new foundation* / We feare will cry it downe" [1638]; George Chapman [actually Glapthorne?], *Revenge for Honour* (1659), $A2^b$: "Our Author hopes . . . that in this Play / He . . . may / Gain liking from you all, unlesse those few / Who wil dislike, be't ne're so good, so new" [1637–41]; Shirley, *Poems* (1646), 149, not produced in *Dramatic Works*: "The worst that can befall at this new Play, / Is, we shall suffer, if we loose the day."

[20] Beaumont and Fletcher, *Dramatic Works*, 8:170, 6:452. For the suggestion that the prologue to *Two Noble Kinsmen* might have been written for a revival, see Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56.

[21] Even revived plays went through the motions, their second "first performances" being indicated by new prologues—as with "The Prologue at the Reviving of this Play" that fronts Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Nice Valour*, in *Dramatic Works*, 7:496. Revised-play prologues do, however, tend to refer the audience back to their initial judgment. See Beaumont and Fletcher, *Custom of the Country*, in *Dramatic Works*, 8:643: "It were injustice to decry this now / . . . being like'd before"; and their *The Coxcomb*, in *Dramatic Works*, 1:269: "The worke . . . when it first came forth, / In the opinion of men of worth, / Was well receiv'd, and favour'd."

day by the audience, like Jonson's *New Inn* (1631), censured by the "hundred fastidious *impertinents* . . . present the first day" [1629].[22] Enraged poets might attribute their damnation to the players' bad performances or the audience's bad judgment. One of the most amusing is Henry King's claim that *The Marriage of Arts* failed simply because he had not used the cheap tricks employed by Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night*:

> Had there appear'd some sharp cross-garter'd man
> Whom their loud laugh might nick-name Puritan,
> Cas'd up in factious breeches and small ruffe . . .
> Then sure they would have given applause to crown
> That which their ignorance did now cry down.[23]

But if prologue and epilogue tagged plays as being new, then that has significant implications, for it means that a first performance had different trappings than other performances: a first performance looked "other," was marketed differently.

PROLOGUE, EPILOGUE, AND THE PLAY

The way paper prologues and epilogues were treated in the playhouse illustrates their impermanence. The pages containing prologues and epilogues seem sometimes to have been kept separate from the books containing the plays themselves, leaving them in a hinterland between attachment and non-attachment. In the induction to *Thorny Abbey*, the Fool, expecting to need help with his lines, gives the loose sheet on which his prologue is written to the prompter as he enters—his prologue was not written into the playbook.[24] Indeed, as prologues,

[22] Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, 6:397. See also Fletcher's *Monsieur Thomas* (1639), in Beaumont and Fletcher, *Dramatic Works*, 4:425, condemned "At first presenting" because "but a few [of the audience] / What was legitimate, what bastard, knew" [1610–c. 1616]; and Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* (1609?), in Beaumont and Fletcher, *Dramatic Works*, 3:491, "scornd" by its original audience [1608–9]. Glapthorne's *Ladies' Privilege* (1640), $A3^b$, tells of the spectators who "for shortnesse force the Author run, / and end his Play before his Plot be done"; the Epilogue to Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV* (1600), in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 964, recently concluded a "displeasing play." Peter Hausted's *The Rival Friends* (1632) tells on its title page how it "was . . . Cryed downe by Boyes, Faction, Envie, and confident Ignorance, approv'd by the judicious, and now exposed to the publique censure." See also Jonson's *Sejanus* (1605) [1603]; Francis Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613) [1607–c. 1610]; John Webster's *The White Devil* (1612) [1609–12]; Massinger's *Emperor of the East* (1632) [1631].

[23] King, *Poems, Elegies, Paradoxes, and Sonnets* (1657), 23. The poem itself dates from no later than 1636. See Henry King, *The Stoughton Manuscript*, facsim. ed. Mary Hobbs (Aldershot: Scolar, 1990), 168.

[24] Reproduced in *A Choice Ternary of English Plays*, ed. William M. Baillie (Binghampton,

epilogues, songs, and letters could be read in performance, their content was often not recorded in the playbook at all, and consequently they were easily lost before publication; printed plays thought to derive from theater manuscripts (rather than foul-papers) frequently lack prologues and epilogues altogether.[25] As the reader of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's 1679 *Complete Works* is told by the Bookseller, the prologues, epilogues, and songs for the plays were previously missing, but now a "worthy Gentleman" has supplied them, and they have all been "inserted in their proper places."[26] Actually, what the gentleman has provided are not originals, for most of his prologues and epilogues refer to the plays as revised revivals, which is telling in itself: prologues and epilogues aged at a different rate from the texts they were attached to; a revamped play needed a new apology. Indeed, an anecdote suggests that Fletcher's original prologues had a particular need to be replaced. The testy playwright thought them "needless and lame excuses"; when the actors demanded that he provide a prologue for a court performance, in "his indignation [he] rendred them . . . the onely bad Lines his modest Thalia was ever humbled with."[27]

Even a different venue might alter the need—or the nature of the need—for a prologue. For *The Cuckqueans and Cuckolds Errants* William Percy, the playwright, provides a prologue that is "Rather to be omitted if for Powles, and another Prologue for [Tarlton's ghost] to be brought in Place"—a prologue, presumably, that someone else must write.[28] At the same time, prologues and epilogues had a popularity of their own, separate from their plays. That is one of the reasons why books of poems so often contain free-floating stage-orations, not all of which are even linked to a particular play (like Shirley's "To another Play there" [Ireland]), and why it was possible for traveling players sometimes to buy their food for "the Copie of a *Prologue*."[29] Printed plays are selectively and, it sometimes seems, slightly randomly provided with prologues

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NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1984), 45. The playwright, "T. W.," has not been identified. Baillie gives a late commonwealth date for this prologue, but given that theaters were closed during the time of Cromwell, the prologue probably continues to reflect Renaissance practice.

[25] E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 1:124.

[26] Beaumont and Fletcher, *Fifty Comedies and Tragedies* (1679), A1[a]. For further examples of revised plays with new stage-orations, see Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 137.

[27] Edward Phillips, *The Mysteries of Love and Eloquence* (1658), A3[a].

[28] Percy, *The Cuckqueans* (London, 1824), 6.

[29] Shirley, *Poems*, in *Works*, 6:495; Nabbes, *Covent Garden* (1638), 3.

and epilogues. Such stage-orations as are supplied are divided from the script they accompany: they are generally arranged on the preliminary pages before the numbering starts, and they vary typographically from the rest of the text. Even when present in printed editions, prologues and epilogues are not treated as though they are one with their plays, a unity, sharing the same rights. Rather, they exist in the textual periphery, kept with the play, but not seen as entirely part of it, easily dropped in favor of other prologues and epilogues—or of nothing.

As with the printed texts, so also on stage, players who were Prologues and Epilogues[30] occupied a liminal space between play and audience. They did not dress like actors, but nor did they look like spectators. There is one woodcut that purports to depict a Prologue. It accompanies the prologue and epilogue to Abraham Cowley's university play, *The Guardian* (separately published in 1641), and it shows a man holding a written document in one hand and a hat and cloak in the other. In fact, the figure is broken off from a larger engraving in which he is a messenger bringing a paper to a concerned bishop, the words "rede and considar" scrolling out of his mouth.[31] With the inscription and bishop cut away, the printer turned the image into a Prologue, the clutched document now representing the text to be read on stage. But more than just the written paper makes this character suitable for a Prologue. The submissive posture, in particular, probably brought the playhouse functionary to the printer's mind, for the messenger leans forward making a bow. More importantly still, he has a great cloak, and the Prologue's cloak had been prescribed by tradition. In Thomas Heywood's *Four Prentises of London* [c. 1592–1600], the Prologue describes himself as wearing a "long blacke velvet cloake"; this remained regulation dress well into the 1630s. For example, the Prologue to Sir William Davenant's *Love and Honour* (1649) sports a "grave, long, old cloak" [1634]; and the woman prologue-speaker to Shirley's *Coronation* (1640) declares she has the same rights as "he / that with . . . a long black cloak, / With a starch'd face, and supple leg hath spoke / Before the

[30] Capitals are used for the characters of Prologue and Epilogue; lower case, for what they say.

[31] Reproduced in Autrey Nell Wiley, *Rare Prologues and Epilogues 1642–1700* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1940), 4. John Astington points out ("Rereading Illustrations of the English Stage," *Shakespeare Survey* 50 [1997]: 151–70) that the full illustration was originally designed for *The Canterburie Pilgrimage* (1641) and that it was also used as a frontispiece to *An Exact Copy of a Letter* and *A Conspiracy of the Twelve Bishops*. I have found an additional use of it for *Sir Francis Seymor, his Honourable and Worthy Speech* (1641). All are printed for H. Walker.

Plays the twelvemonth" [1635].[32] Another item of dress that was entirely standard was the wreath of bays worn around the temples. This was striking enough, and usual enough, to make its way into the analogies of the time, so that "*Some*," writes Samuel Rowlands, "(as bold *Prologues* do to *Playes*), / With *Garlonds* have their *Fore-heads* bound."[33] In other words there was a Prologue uniform that united all Prologues to each other as an across-play character. Even those eschewing traditional Prologue-garb simply adopted another kind of standard dress that, in a different way, symbolized their function. This was the more combative "armed Prologue" costume, worn by a speaker who visibly expected the worst from a critical audience; it was particularly popular during turbulent times. Such is the Prologue to Jonson's *Poetaster* (1602), who wears a "forc't defense" against his potentially inimical audience [1601], and the Prologue to Henry Glapthorne's *Wit in a Constable* [1636–38], whose speaker (the actor who is to play the part of the constable) appears already in office and armed for the same reason.[34] Even then, however, Prologues did and said similar things: they were seldom supposed to be unique, and combative Prologues in one playhouse were matched by combative Prologues in another. As the world-weary Prologue to Fletcher's *Humorous Lieutenant* (1647) put it, ultimately the "Prologue, usuall to a play, / Is tied to . . . an old forme of Petition / . . . The cloakes we weare, the leggs we make, the place / We stand in, must be one" [1619].[35] Prologues were instantly identifiable as such, linked in appear-

[32] Heywood, *Works*, 2:165; Davenant, *Dramatic Works*, 3:99; Shirley, *Works*, 3:458. See also the Induction to Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, and Edward Phillips, *The Mysteries of Love and Eloquence* (1658), A3ª: "Prologues were . . . set and starcht speeches to be gravely delivered . . . by the man in the long cloak with the coloured beard."

[33] Rowlands, *Pimlico* (1609), B2ª. See also Anthony Rudd, Thomas Richards, and Laurence Johnson, *Misogonus*, ed. R. Warwick Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 174: "ask . . . why I decke my temples thus wth bayes" [1577]; Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Woman Hater* (1607), in *Dramatic Works*, 1:157: "A Prologue in Verse is as stale, as a black Velvet Cloake, and a Bay Garland."

[34] Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, 4:205; Glapthorne, *Wit in a Constable* (1640), A4ª. See also the prologue to Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, in *Riverside Shakespeare*, 482, described as "A prologue arm'd"; John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* has an armed epilogue. The vogue for the combative prologue has been traced to the theater wars, but given its habit of cropping up over time it is more likely simply to reflect its author's preference for threatening the audience rather than begging them.

[35] Beaumont and Fletcher, *Dramatic Works*, 5:303. Similarly, Roger Shipman's *Grobiana's Nuptials*: "can't our buisinesse bee done . . . but a Coxe-combe in a cloke must scrape his lease of leggs to begge *Sir* Tottipate's applause in dogrime verse?" [1637–41], quoted by J. C. Bentley in *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940–68), 5:1055.

ance to a long line of Prologues, rather than to the particular play they were introducing.

But if prologues and, indeed, epilogues (fashion dictated sometimes one, sometimes the other, sometimes both) were spoken only for special occasions, what effect did they have on the play that they framed? One effect is, of course, that they linked that play visually with any other similarly surrounded: a play with a stage-oration looks like another play with a stage-oration and unlike a play without. Obvious as that may sound, it is telling to realize that every new play was promoted in the same way and resembled every other new play.

So it is important to fathom what relationship prologues had to the rest of the text that made them necessary on the first performance. And the answer to that resides in the Prologues' clothes. The black cloak of the Prologue seems to be derived from a scholar's gown, but the wreath of laurel ("bays") has a more particular meaning. Bays symbolized poetic creativity; they were the garland given to reward a successful poet (*OED*, s.v. "bay" n. 1.3). So the Prologue crowned in bays represented, and yet was not, the "author" of the text.[36] And at first sight this may seem absurd: the Prologue's most notable feature is his depersonalized and ritualized appearance. But "the poet" the Prologue represents is not—and is seldom intended to be—the actual playwright. He is a theatrical fiction, acting occasionally as though he wrote the plays (the Prologue to Samuel Harding's *Fatal Union* says "thus your Poet stands, / Expecting his owne destiny from your hands" [not performed]), and usually as though he did not—but knows who did: "Thus from the Poet am I bid to say" [c. 1619–20]; "hee [the playwright] doth now, / In mee present his service" [1631].[37] The Prologue is, however, *visually* the "author" of the play and takes on himself *theatrical* ownership of the text. He offers the play in the most positive way possible, standing wreathed in laurels won for the success of other plays (by other playwrights) and remembered fondly by the audience for the last new play "he" introduced—and the one before. He it is who begs acceptance for the text in its youthful form, and he it is who takes responsibility for its faults; he also represents the range of special first-performance events that can happen to that text.

[36] Masten, in *Textual Intercourse*, 64, explains that in the Renaissance "author" might mean the "person who originates or gives existence to anything" rather than "the writer of the text."

[37] William Rowley, *All's Lost by Lust* (1633), A3^{b}; Massinger, *Emperor of the East* (1632), in *Plays and Poems*, 3:407.

The actual playwright, though a feature of the Prologues' address, remains unnamed because of the reauthoring process: the theatrical "author" is more important than the actual author. So the real writer, when referred to at all, is "poet," "writer," or "playmaker," a functionary without individuality. The Prologue, on the other hand, sometimes does have a name, and a writer's name at that—but if so, his title relates to the fiction of the play, not the fact, like "Bardh" in *The Valiant Welshman*. As Walter F. Eggers points out, it was Gower in *Pericles*, not Shakespeare or George Wilkins, who carried bays and dressed in the Prologue's cloak (see the drawing of Gower in the title page of George Wilkins' 1608 *Painfull Aduenture of Pericles*).[38] In a number of ways Prologues (and Epilogues) were thus the least playwright-related bits of the text. A collaborative play—one written by Beaumont and Fletcher, for instance—would still be introduced by a single Prologue-author. And sometimes the same prologue was made to serve for two plays by different authors, like the one that, ironically, claims to know precisely who sits in the audience ready to carp (confronting them with the playwright's previously "wonne grace" in the theater), which fronts both William Rowley's *All's Lost by Lust* [1619–20] (1633) and Thomas Dekker's *Wonder of a Kingdom* [1619–31] (1636).[39] Moreover, prologues were often written by someone other than the playwright—generally the dramatist attached to the theatrical company.[40] That, too, would further tie all such "new" plays together as a unity while separating them from their writers, and it puts an interesting light on the whole notion of authorship and the theater at the time.

The Epilogue had a specific task, which was "to Inquire / the censure of the play. or to desire / pardon for what*es* amisse" [1631].[41] But he shared his approach and devices not with the plays he was attached to, but with other Prologues and Epilogues. So, for instance, the famous Epilogue to 2 *Henry IV* links himself not just with Shakespeare's play but also with another that he recently concluded and that the audience damned: he, the Epilogue, is the same character; the plays, however, are

[38] Eggers, "Shakespeare's Gower and the Role of the Authorial Presenter," *Philological Quarterly* 54 (1975): 434.

[39] Here quoted from Rowley, *All's Lost by Lust* (1633), A3^{b}.

[40] Bentley, *Dramatist*, 135.

[41] Massinger, *Believe as you List*, in *Plays and Poems*, 3:390. See also Beaumont and Fletcher, *Custom of the Country*, in *Dramatic Works*, 8:738: "the old and usuall way, / For which [epilogues] were made, was to entreat the grace / Of . . . spectators"; Shirley, *St Patrick for Ireland* (1640), in *Works*, 4:443: "may I stay, / And boldly ask your verdict of the play?" (1639).

different—"I was lately here in the end of a displeasing Play, to pray your Patience for it, and to promise you a Better." Fascinatingly, that *2 Henry IV* Epilogue then goes on to express the hope that this play will be accepted as payment for the last, once again speaking as though he has authored all the plays his theater has offered ("I meant . . . to pay you with this"), a hope that sits oddly with his later distinction between "our humble author" and himself.[42] Like Prologues, Epilogues, too, might come dressed as beggars or rigged up in defensive armor.[43] The Epilogue deals slightly differently with the fact or fiction of his situation, however, sometimes simply standing up from his position on stage and directly addressing the audience in what he is wearing, as does "Rosalind" in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, "Prospero" in *The Tempest*, or "Ulysses," left alone on the stage at the end of Heywood's 1612–13 *Iron Age Part II* (1632): "since I am the man soly reserv'd / Accept me for the Authors Epilogue."[44] As with Prologues, though, this simply indicates that the fictional story is more important than the fact of authorship. And the phrase "Author's Epilogue," and indeed the "humble Author" of *2 Henry IV*, shows Epilogues, like Prologues, standing in for an all-purpose "author" without identifying him individually.

The first showing of a new public theater play was, then, a site of division between the real author and a phoney author. In a number of ways the separation of the two affects their behaviour on that all-important performance, and that itself affects the nature of the text then and afterward. Before discussing the playwright's relationship to prologue and epilogue, it is useful to examine how else the first performance was differently marketed—and why.

FIRST PERFORMANCES

New plays were enormously popular. On first performances, spectators crammed the theaters. Thomas Dekker, in his his *Dreame* of 1620, writes how "at some direfull Tragoedy (before / Not Acted), men prease round about the dore / Crowding for Entrance"; in *Newes from Hell* he describes a crowd as thick "as if it had beene at a new Play." Pickpock-

[42] Shakespeare, *Riverside Shakespeare*, 964–65.

[43] For example, there is an "armed epilogue" in Marston, *Antonio and Mellida* (1602) [1599–1600], in *The Plays of John Marston*, ed. H. Harvey Wood, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1934–39), 1:63.

[44] Heywood, *Works*, 3:430. See also Chapman [actually Glapthorne?], *Revenge for Honour* (1659), 63.

ets, he observed in his *Jests* of 1607, were always busiest at a new play.[45] Unsurprisingly, market forces reflected that popularity, and the price of admission into the theater was regularly raised for all first days: Samuel Kiechel affirmed this as a normal occurrence in 1585, and it was still the custom under Jonson ("when thy Fox had ten times acted been, / Each day was first, but that 'twas cheaper seen"); indeed, the habit of charging more for an opening day continued well into the Restoration.[46] The theater's hard-nosed concern for income contrasted ironically with the free goodwill the prologues and epilogues begged for, as some were quick to point out: well may players "pray the Company that's in, to heare them patiently," writes D. Lupton, "yet they would not suffer them to come in without payment."[47] The audience were, of course, intrigued by the new material—but their anxiety to attend the first performance in particular should be examined, given that they would encounter a low standard of acting on that day (plays were scarcely group-rehearsed at all until *after* they had "proved" themselves on the stage).[48] Spectators were paying for something special, and prologues and epilogues were only an element of it.

Some of what spectators were after is suggested by the vocabulary given to the first performance. Special words were used for that day, words that have their origin, seemingly, in the law courts. Many stage orations refer to the time of a play's "test" or "trial," the time before it is known whether the drama itself will take: "That you should authorize [the play] after the Stages tryall was not my intention" [1633–34]; "The court's on rising; 'tis too late / To wish the lady in her fate / Of trial

[45] Dekker, *The Non-Dramatic Works*, ed. Alexander B. Grossart, 5 vols. (1885; reprint, New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 3:35; 2:118; 2:327. See also Rowlands, *Pimlico* (1609), C1[a]: "(As at a *New-play*) all the *Roomes* / Did swarme with *Gentiles* mix'd with *Groomes*."

[46] See William B. Rye, *England as Seen by Foreigners in the Days of Elizabeth and James I* (1865), 88, which paraphrases Samuel Kiechel's notes of 1585: "it may indeed happen . . . that the players take from fifty to sixty dollars, at a time, particularly if they act any thing new, when people have to pay double." For first performance admission prices before the interregnum, see E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 2:532; Roslyn Lander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company 1594–1613* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991), 25. Entrance charges for new plays during the Restoration period are referred to in Samuel Pepys, *The Diary*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols. (London: Bell and Hyman, 1970–83), 2:234: "to the Opera . . . and it being the first time, the pay was doubled." For the continuance into the eighteenth century of charging doubled or at least "advanced" prices for first-night performances, see Alwin Thaler, *Shakspere to Sheridan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), 229–33.

[47] Lupton, *London and the Country Carbonadoed* (1632), 79.

[48] Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 49–51, 76–78.

now more fortunate" [1638].[49] Shakespeare's Folio plays "have had their triall alreadie" (A3[a]).[50] By extension, the overseers of the "trial" are the "judges." So the audience who damned Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* during its first performance and before they had seen all of it are called by the bitter Jonson "The wise, and many-headed *Bench*, that sits / Upon the Life, and Death of *Playes*"; Heywood writes of the "judiciall spirits" of the audience who will either banish his play or allow it to appear upon the stage again; Dekker declares through his prologue that "Hee knows what Judges sit to Doome each Play" and begs the kinder members of the audience to steer his muse to a safe harbor.[51] Playwrights and players, too, stand at the "bar" waiting to hear the censure of the spectators.[52] In some ways this further illustrates that link between playhouse and inns of court; in particular, it suggests how important members of the inns of court were in the play-judging process. But another issue is raised by the vocabulary of the trial. What is being tested in the first performance is not the players, for they can put on another play if this one is damned; their livelihood is not affected by one play specifically. Rather, the text itself is being auditioned, and the audience are paying for the right to put it in the dock. That means that the presence of first-performance prologues or epilogues signify that the play is unjudged—or rather, up for censure and, perhaps, reformation.

No wonder, then, that playwrights tended to be present for the first

[49] Nabbes, *Tottenham Court* (1636), A3[b]; John Ford, *The Lady's Trial* (1639), in *The Works of John Ford*, ed. William Gifford, 3 vols. (London, 1895), 3:99.

[50] See also "The Description of a Poet," in William Fennor, *Fennor's Descriptions* (1616), B2[b]–B3[a]: "Sweet Poesye / Is oft convict, condem'd, and judg'd to die / Without just triall, by a multitude / Whose judgements are illiterate, and rude"; Brome, *The Novella*, in *Works* 1:104: "Hee'll 'bide his triall, and submits his cause / To you the Jury" [1632–33].

[51] Jonson, "To the worthy Author M. *John Fletcher*," in Beaumont and Fletcher, *Faithful Shepherdess* (1609?), in *Dramatic Works*, 3:492; Heywood, *The Golden Age* (1611), in *Works* 3:79 [1609–11]; Dekker, *The Wonder of a Kingdom* (1636), in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 3:577 [1623–31]. See also Dekker, *Non-Dramatic*, 2:249: "by being a Justice in examining of plaies, you shall put your selfe into . . . true scaenical authority"; Davenant, *Madagascar, with Other Poems* (1638), 87: "some tim'rous Poets . . . / Hope for no easie Judge"; Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Coxcomb*, in *Dramatic Works*, 1:269: "now 'tis to be tri'd / Before such Judges, 'twill not be deni'd / A . . . noble hearing" [1608–10]; Glapthorne, *Wit in a Constable* (1640), A4[a]: "you (who now my Judges sit)" [1636–38]; Glapthorne, *Ladies Privilege* (1640), A3[b]: "our feare [is], / least what our Author writes should not appeare / Fit for this Judging presence" [1637–40]; Shirley, *The Imposture* (1652), in *Works*, 5:181: "You, gentlemen, that sit / Our judges" [1640].

[52] For the first, see Carlell, *Arviragus* (1639), E4[b]: "Our Author at the Barre of Censure stands" [1635-36]; for the second, see Nabbes, *The Bride* (1640), L1[b]: "'Tis arraign'd; / And doubtful stands before your judgements barre, / Expecting what your severall censures are" [1638].

performance—for that would also determine whether they would ever have a benefit day. Surprisingly, there is quite a lot of incidental evidence confirming this, describing the position and feelings of playwrights on the "judgmental" performance. Jonson, of course, was famous for going out onto the stage when his play had finished to exchange "curtezies" with the gallants.[53] But for the most part the playwright was present—and hidden. It is this that the Prologue to Dekker's *If This Be Not a Good Play, the Devil Is In It* (1612) is objecting to when he wishes it were customary that "at all New-playes / *The Makers* sat o'th's*tage*" and received their criticisms themselves [1611].[54] Instead, however, the playwright generally stayed in the tiring-house where the spectators could not see him, "listening behind the arras, to hear what will become of his play" [1636].[55] His state of first-performance nerves as he waited to hear the result of the test was intense, and it was a standard theater joke that a nervous playwright could not distinguish between the opening of bottled ale and a hiss. So a poet's "shakings and quakinges, towardes the latter end of [his] new play" are described in *The Woman Hater* [1606], where "he standes peeping betwixt the curtaines, so fearefully, that a bottle of Ale cannot be opened, but he thinkes some body hisses."[56] Speech by speech, the playwright was conscious of—and terrified by—the opinion of the audience; one Prologue describes the poor hidden playwright standing with his cloak and hat muffling his head "to hinder from his eare, / The scorns and censures he may shortly hear" [1635].[57] And yet this prologue broadcasts the author's fear whilst at the same time reminding the audience of the right they have paid

[53] Dekker, *Satiromastix* (1602), in *Dramatic Works*, 1:382.

[54] Dekker, *Dramatic Works*, 3:121.

[55] Shirley, *The Duke's Mistress* (1638), in *Works* 4:274. Brome wants no one to claim he "skulks behind the hangings . . . affraid / Of a hard censure" (*English Moor*, in *Works*, 2:86); Jonson and Brome together stood "behind the Arras" to watch the reception of the "new sufficient Play," *Bartholomew Fair* (Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, 6:13, 15). In Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Lover's Progress* (1647), the revising author takes on the mantle of any other first-performance author, "*Still doubtfull, and perplex'd too, whether he / Hath done* Fletcher *right in this Historie, / The Poet sits within*" (*Dramatic Works*, 10:527). See also Glapthorne, *Ladies Privilege* (1640), $J2^b$, where the playwright is described as standing "pensive in the Tyring-house to heare Your Censures of his Play" [Cockpit, 1637–40]; the poet is also described as being in the tiring-house in Abraham Cowley's *Love's Riddle* (1638), $G4^a$ [unacted, 1633–36] and in *Wily Beguiled* (1606), $A2^b$ [Paul's?, 1601–2]. For more on the subject, see Tiffany Stern, "Behind the Arras: The Prompter's Place in the Shakespearean Theatre," *Theatre Notebook* (2001): 110–18.

[56] Beaumont and Fletcher, *Dramatic Works*, 1:175; conversely John Stephens's *A base Mercenary Poet*, in *Satirical Essays* (1615), 292: "when hee heares his play hissed, . . . would rather thinke bottle-Ale is opening."

[57] Davenant, *The Platonic Lovers* (1636), in *Dramatic Works*, 2:6.

extra for—the right to scorn, censure, mew, hiss, and throw apples at the hangings. The Prologue is a contradiction, allowing the very things that he begs should not happen.

Then again, one of the main purposes of Prologues and, especially, Epilogues, will have been that they could receive the audience's criticism objectively. While the actual playwright trembled and shivered backstage, fronting his play was a known "author" who could accept audience criticism, and respond to it, without taking personal umbrage. Meanwhile the real playwright could hear what the audience had to say whilst sheltering from their ferocity. At the same time, that divided "author" reveals a deeper division between playwrights and actors, depicted feelingly in the epilogue to Shirley's *The Cardinal* [1641]. The idea here is that the real writer, standing backstage in the tiring-room, has thrust the actor playing the Epilogue onto the stage with too much force. One author pushes another. So the Epilogue decides to be revenged on "Mr. Poet" with the audience's help:

> I have a teeming mind to be reveng'd.—
> You may assist, and not be seen in't now,
> If you please, gentlemen, for I do know
> He listens to the issue of his cause;
> But blister not your hands in his applause;
> Your private smile, your nod, or hem! to tell
> My fellows that you like the business well;
> And when, without a clap, you go away,
> I'll drink a small-beer health to his second day;
> And break his heart, or make him swear and rage,
> He'll write no more for the unhappy stage.

At the last minute, he relents:

> But that's too much; so we should lose; faith, show it,
> And if you like his play, 'tis as well he knew it.[58]

The Epilogue is surprising in its brusqueness given that Shirley himself almost certainly wrote it (he was a well-known prologue- and epilogue-writer as well as playwright). But as a professional writer, he will have known how first performances worked. He will have known that the audience's opinion of the success of the day could be made by the prologue and epilogue (and that siding with the audience against the playwright might be just the kind of joke it liked); and he will have

[58] Shirley, *Works*, 5:352.

known also that Prologues and Epilogues, played as they were by actors, had an actor's stake in the play's success, not a writer's. So one thing Shirley's Epilogue exemplifies is some of the gimmicky devices prologues and epilogues might use to succeed, given that "judgment" began with the prologue itself. Philip Massinger makes this point when in *The Emperor of the East* he gives Philamax an analogy in which he chillingly reflects that, whatever "the play may prove, . . . / I doe not like the prologue," though Christopher Brooke gives the caution that plays can still be, as he feelingly puts it, "exploded, though the Prologue be never so good, and promising."[59] If a prologue took, then the play to follow would have a chance; if not, the day was, perhaps, already doomed: "You'd smile," says one Prologue of his playwright, "to see, how he do's vex and shake, / Speakes naught but if the Prologue does but take, / Or the first Act were past the Pikes once, then— / Then hopes and Joys, then frowns and fears agen" [1634–35?].[60] So, too, with epilogues. "What thinkst thou of this great day, *Baltazar*?" asks the King in Dekker's *Noble Spanish Soldier* (1634). "Of this day?" replies Balthazar, "why as of a new play, if it ends well, all's well" [1622].[61] This is one of the reasons, presumably, why stage-orations were often written by professionals rather than by fledgling playwrights: it widened the gap between stage-oration and play, but at least it delayed the potential damning process during the first—or last—important minutes.

Yet the Epilogue's final repentance, as quoted above, is barbed: the Epilogue will not lose the author his "second day," but only because the actors, too, would lose out if that were the case. In many ways prologues and epilogues were about the concerns of the playhouse. Well may the play need stage-orations, and need them to succeed in performance; the actors only needed a stage-oration to succeed in its own right—so that if the play *were* "displeasing," the reputation of the acting company would not suffer as a result: a poet's failure must not pull down the players. Hence the division: playwrights and players did not have the same stake in the play's success. Careful actors would even tactically distance themselves from the play in its early days. John Stephens, describing the character of a "common player," writes disdainfully of someone so ready to kowtow to the audience's opinion that he will not risk praising the play he is in "till he hath either spoken, or heard

[59] Massinger, *Plays and Poems*, 3:428; Brooke, *Ghost of Richard the Third* (1614), 4π^{b}.
[60] Prologue to *The Scholars*, in Francis Beaumont, *Poems by Francis Beaumont* (1653), 75.
[61] Dekker, *Dramatic Works*, 4:292.

the *Epilogue*: neither dares he entitle good things *Good*, unlesse hee be heartned on by the multitude"—until, that is to say, he knows that the play has taken with the audience.[62] From the actors' point of view, then, a damned play would be an irritation—a set of lines learned for a single performance. But nothing too terrible. From the playwright's point of view, a damned play would mean financial trouble. Well may Aston Cokain's prologue claim, "He wants no money as the case now stands, / Yet prayes you to be liberal of your hands."[63] Published scripts show that playwrights were prepared to do much to make their play take on the first day. Helpless during the performance itself, miserably listening while the Prologue or Epilogue bantered about their profoundest hopes of success and deepest fears of failure, playwrights had only two other options open to them—one was to affect the audience beforehand, and the other to change the play afterward.

The first option was regarded as "cheating." It involved providing a claque—a designer audience full of friends to applaud the text on the first day. At the lowest end of the scale, this might consist of a set of bullies using underhand tactics to get a play passed. This said little for the poet's merit—but it would at least secure him one more day. Edmund Gayton writes of a production

> most ridiculously penn'd and acted, where the Auditors (who notwithstanding, convinced in judgement to the contrary) durst dislike nothing, but gave great Plaudites to most things that were to be hiss'd off the Stage with the Speakers; but the exhibitors of that shew politiquely had plac'd Whistlers arm'd and link'd through the Hall, that it was the spoyl of a Beaver hat, the firing a Gown, beside many a shrew'd Bastinado, to looke with a condemning face upon any solaecisme, either in action or language.[64]

Another description is given in the Prologue's conversation with three gentlemen in John Day's *Isle of Gulls* (1606). Here the whole point is that the playwright is above using any such means:

> *2*: [W]here sit [the Poet's] friends? Hath he not a prepared company of gallants, to applaud his jests, and grace out his play?
> *Prol.*: None I protest. Do Poets use to bespeake their Auditory? . . . Our Author . . . is unfurnisht of . . . a friendly audience. . . .
> *1*: Then he must lay his triall upon God and good wits.

[62] Stephens, *Satirical Essays*, 245–46.
[63] Cokain, *Small Poems of Divers Sorts* (1658), 410.
[64] Gayton, *Pleasant Notes upon Don Quixote* (1654), 245–46.

The Prologue proudly agrees that the playwright is going to trust to his talent. But he has one fear:

> *Prol.*: [T]is growen into a custome at Playes, if any one rise (especially of any fashionable sort) about what serious business soever, the rest thinking it in dislike of the play, though he never thinks it, cry mew, by Jesus vilde; and leave the poore heartlesse children to speake their Epilogue to the empty seats.[65]

Here the Prologue assures the Gentlemen of the play's merits while insecurely reminding them that it may fail for other reasons like the waywardness of the audience or its stupidity. Method two offered more security.

The promise of post-first-performance revision if necessary is suggested by later theatrical practice. A look forward in time reveals that Restoration prologues and epilogues heralded a particular stage in a play's textual life. Alteration in the light of first-night censure was normal practice, the second night usually being then delayed until improvements had been completed. John Dennis removed a satire from *Liberty Asserted* "after the first Night"; a whole character—Count Bellair—was excised from *The Beaux Stratagem* after the initial performance; Mary Manley was highly distressed when one of her lead actresses, Mrs. Bracegirdle, left the theater just before *Almyna* was to have its second performance, because by that time "the Alterations" had been "annex'd" onto the play.[66] Audience criticism given in the later seventeenth century resulted in changes being made to the very plots of plays: "after the first Representation of this Play, the Conclusion was alter'd: *Agamemnon* is left to continue in a Swoon, and the Scene is clos'd with these few lines."[67] Plays were regularly shortened after the opening day, taking audience response into account: for example, in *Sir John Cockle*

[65] Day, *Isle of Gulls* (1606), A2^{a}.

[66] Dennis, *Liberty Asserted* (1704), A2^{b}; Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Producible Interpretation* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 44; Mary de la Rivière Manley, *Almyna* (1707), A1^{b}. Other late-seventeenth-century plays that underwent alterations directly after the first night include William Killigrew's *Pandora* (1664), which was changed from a tragedy to a comedy to please the audience (A8^{b}) and George Farquhar's *The Constant Couple* (1699), the fifth act of which was rewritten—see George Farquhar, *The Works* (1660), 1:141–44, 361–63. Eighteenth-century examples include William Popple, *Lady's Revenge* (1734), A4^{a}: "The Second Night the particular Things objected to, being taken out, the Play was acted from Beginning to End, without one single Mark of Displeasure in the Audience."

[67] George Granville, *Heroic Love* (1678), A2^{a}.

at Court, Robert Dodsley apologizes for "some Things which the Audience very justly found Fault with" on the first performance "and which, the second Time, were left out or alter'd as much as possible: And the Author takes this Opportunity of thanking the Town for so judiciously and favourably correcting him."[68]

But evidence suggests that the history of first-performance revision extends back in time long before this. If an early modern prologue describes the play it fronts as a maid, is not that itself telling? For virgins are physically changed by the events of the first night. And something of the sort seems to be suggested by Thomas Middleton when, in *Father Hubburd's Tales*, a young gallant is advised to go to the Bankside to see what is described as "the first cut of a tragedy."[69] Would reshaping happen later? When the Prologue to Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* asks his audience to give their "sleek acceptance" and "polish these rude Sceanes," what is he implying?[70] Jonson grudgingly gave way to criticism—in the 1600 Quarto for his *Every Man Out of His Humour* he explains how the play originally "had another *Catastrophe* or Conclusion, at the first Playing: which . . . many seem'd not to rellish . . . ; and therefore 'twas since alter'd."[71] Abraham Cowley, writing of *The Guardian*, is more straightforward on the matter. As the play was "rough-drawn onely" when it was rushed into performance for the prince, he had been only too happy to revise the text. "After the Representation . . . I began to look it over, and changed it very much striking out some whole parts, as that of the Poet and the Souldier," he explains; in fact, what he is furious about is that someone has published the uncorrected first-performance version.[72] It seems possible that, from a time in theatrical history hard to date precisely, some plays on their opening performances may have been offered as mutable texts ready for audience revision, with the presence of the stage-orations broadcasting that fact.

Possibly this revision question ties in with an issue raised by Andrew Gurr in another context. He gathers evidence to show that plays may well have usually existed in more than one form: a longer, ideal, "maximal" text that was passed by the Master of the Revels, and a shorter,

[68] Dodsley, *Sir John Cockle* (1738), A3^{b}. For more examples see Stern, *Rehearsal*, 187–92.
[69] Middleton, *The Works*, ed. A. H. Bullen, 8 vols. (London, 1886), 8:77.
[70] Marston, *Plays*, 1:11.
[71] Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, 3:602. See also his "To the Reader," in *Poetaster*, *Ben Jonson*, 4:317–24. There Jonson explains how he has accepted criticism and made revisions after the premier.
[72] Cowley, *Poems* (1656), A1^{b}.

"minimal" text that the company performed. While not looking at the moment at which revision takes place, he tentatively wonders whether the playhouse manuscript was routinely cut in performance and questions how it was that speeches were selected for trimming.[73] Could it be that first-performance cutting was made in the light of audience criticism? That would, indeed, be something for the audience to pay for—the chance to dictate the shape a play was to have in the future. And stage-orations do frequently hint at the magnitude of first-performance audience criticism. "Into how many pieces a poore Play / Is taken still before the second day," exclaims the Epilogue to Sir John Suckling's *Goblins* [1637–41].[74] In 1635 the fate of Henry Killigrew's new play *Pallantus and Eudora* hung in the balance while a member of the audience vociferously objected to the fact that "Cleander," who in the story was supposed to be seventeen years old, spoke more like a man of thirty.

> But the Answer that was given to One, that cried out upon the *Monsterousnesse* and *Impossiblitie* of this thing, the first day of the Presentation of the Play at the *Black-Friers*, by the Lord Viscount *Faulkland*, may satisfie All Others. . . . The Noble Person, having for some time suffered the unquiet, and impertinent Dislikes of this Auditor, when he made this last Exception, forbore him no longer, but . . . told him, Sir, *'tis not altogether so Monsterous and Impossible, for One of Seventeen yeares to speak at such a Rate, when He that . . . writ the whole Play, was Himself no Older*.[75]

Prologues and prefaces indicate the variety of local and detailed critiques that could be expected from articulate "censurers": they might pass remarks on the plot ("'tis too thinne" [1604–10]), make specific analyses of the scenes, or have something to say about the language used (" 'This was flat. . . . Here the scene / Fell from its height;' " [c. 1625–33]).[76] Peter Hausted, publishing his damned play *The Rival Friends*, itemizes the way not only his writing, but also his very manners came under scrutiny. He was criticized for making a man rail upon women when the play was being performed in front of "Ladies"; his bringing in four Gulls

[73] Gurr, "Maximal and Minimal Texts: Shakespeare v. The Globe," *Shakespeare Survey* 52 (1999): 68–87.

[74] Suckling, *The Goblins* (1646), 65.

[75] Killigrew, *Pallantus and Eudora* (1653), A2[a].

[76] Dekker, *The Roaring Girl* (1611), in *Dramatic Works*, 3:101; Ford, *The Broken Heart* (1633), in *Works*, 1:320. See also Heywood, *A Maidenhead Well Lost* (1634), in *Works* 4:165: "Our Play is new, but whether shaped well / In Act or Seane, Judge you, you best can tell" [1625–34]; and Jonson, *The Case is Altered* (1609), in *Ben Jonson*, 3:136, where, in "Utopia," "the sport is at a new play to observe the sway and variety of oppinion that passeth it . . . one saies he likes not the writing, another likes not the plot, another not the playing."

in the third Act was thought "impertinent to the Plot."[77] And so the criticism goes on. Harding, meanwhile, published his play as performed specifically in order to show "for what a nothing I esteeme their censures; whatsoever syllable there be, that they ever cavill'd at, is therefore not omitted," suggesting pressure had been put on him to alter his play in the light of criticism.[78] William Habington's solution was to enumerate the errors of the play in the prologue and so disarm the audience. Addressing the spectators at the Blackfriers playhouse (another "legal" stronghold), his Prologue opens:

> Ere we begin, that no man may repent
> Two shillings and his time; the Author sent
> The Prologue, with the errors of his Play,
> That who will, may take his money and away.[79]

Of the critics in the audience, some of the most dangerous were other playwrights, who seem often to have had free entrance into playhouses.[80] They sat clutching their "black condemning cole[s]" ready to make objections to the script; the worst adder-tongued censurers amongst them were those who had tried writing once and been "hist from Stage."[81] May some theatrical cuts, thought to have been the result of careful deliberation, be traceable to first-performance demands? Could the great length of some extant texts be traced to the fact that they are plays in a pre-first-performance form? And might the presence of the stage-oration signify that alteration as well as damnation is allowable on this occasion?

It does seem that after a successful first performance, the whole text would be remarketed. For one thing it was presumably advertised on playbill, as it certainly is on frontispiece, as a piece that "hath past the Test of the stage with . . . generall . . . applause."[82] For another, it could lose its prologue or epilogue (though new ones would, of course, be supplied for other one-off special occasions—changes of actor or venue,

[77] Hausted, *The Rival Friends* (1632), A3^{b}–A4^{a}.

[78] Harding, *Sicily and Naples* (1640), (*)2^{a}.

[79] Habington, *The Poems*, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: Hodder and Stouton, 1948), 150.

[80] See John Stephens, "To his worthy Friend, H. F.," in Henry Fitzgeffrey's *Satires and Satirical Epigrams* (1617), F8^{a}: "I must . . . let *Players* know / They cannot recompence your labour: Though / They . . . take no money of you nor your Page." Davenant confirms that this was common practice in the Restoration: "[poets] pay nothing for their entrance" (*The Playhouse to be Let* [1673], in *Dramatic Works*, 4:28).

[81] Joseph Hall, *The Poems*, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), 15; Henry Parrot, *Laquei Ridiculosi* (1613), C8^{a}.

[82] Here quoted from John Cooke, *Green's Tu Quoque* (1614), A2^{a}.

performance in front of royalty, etc.). That loss is obvious from the number of surviving plays with neither prologue nor epilogue (though fashion dictated whether new plays had prologue, epilogue, or both, it is obvious from what survives that new plays usually had something). And the dismissive attitude playwrights have to prologues and epilogues speaks for itself—Massinger presents *The Unnatural Combat* without "such by ornaments" as Prologue or Epilogue, as the tragedy is old and they have now disappeared.[83] A play grew in desirability, it seems, after having been sanctioned *in* performance *by* the spectators; though prologues and epilogues were enjoyed, having no stage-orations will have been a healthy sign indicative of a lasting text.

THE "BENEFIT" PERFORMANCE

In *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* I wondered whether revision after first performance became a real possibility when "benefits" started to become the regular system of payment for poets. The theme will be briefly revisited here, bolstered with a few more references, to secure the connection between stage-orations and benefits, showing how the one implies the other; and, indeed, how the one often refers to the other.

Though the date when benefits began to be a regular method of payment can still not be traced certainly to before 1611, when a Dekker prologue criticizes the kind of playwright who cares only that "he *Gaines*, / A Cramd *Third-Day*," in *Playhouse to Be Let* Davenant maintains that playwrights "us'd to have the second day" right back in the days of Tamburlaine, Faustus, and Beauchamps (in other words, in the time of Marlowe and Heywood), and there are Henslowe accounts that may indicate benefit performances taking place in 1601.[84] Some form of revenue for playwrights relating to the income from performance is shown to be normal by 1617 when, in *The Smoking Age*, a threadbare poet is given a pipe of tobacco which he will "pay . . . at the next new play he makes,

[83] Massinger, *Plays and Poems*, 2:197.

[84] Dekker, *If This Be Not a Good Play, the Devil Is In It* (1612), in *Dramatic Works*, 3:121; Davenant, *Dramatic Works*, 4:31. Philip Henslowe seems to have given a financial gift to John Day "after the playing of the second part of Strowd"—see Bentley, *Dramatist*, 131. Basing his argument on the fact that most positive contemporary references to "benefits" date from the Jacobean and Caroline period, Alwin Thaler suggests that poets' benefits were not generally granted until some point after the accession of King James ("Playwrights' Benefits, and "Interior Gathering" in the Elizabethan Theatre," *Studies in Philology* 16 [1919]: 189). With so little evidence extant on the subject, it is difficult either thoroughly to accept or thoroughly to reject his proposition.

if the Doore-keepers will bee true to him."[85] Throughout the late 1620s and thereafter "benefits" were a usual method of payment, and it was usual, too, for prologues and epilogues to refer to them: "Every labour dyes, / Save such whose second springs comes from your eyes," maintains *The Costly Whore* in 1633.[86] I suspect that first-performance *revision* (as opposed to simple first-performance condemnation-or-approval, which has an older heritage) was instituted around the establishment of benefit performances, for benefits made it in a playwright's best interest to be ready to "reform" a disliked play immediately rather than suffer it to be damned—for, as a 1632 epilogue explains, "[the poet's] promis'd Pay / May chance to faile, if you dislike the Play."[87] There were, anyway, enough poets who did not look to gain lasting fame from their work, but, as Cartwright disgustedly observed, wrote "not to time, but to the Poets day."[88]

CONCLUSION

It is always useful to look at what bearing the stage-oration has to the play it represents. To go back to a subject raised at the start of this essay, Shakespeare's prologues and epilogues offer some telling comments on the nature of their attachment to the plays they are latched to. The Epilogue to *2 Henry IV* says that Falstaff will be seen again only if he has not already been "kill'd" by the audience's "hard opinions," seemingly indicating that it is a first-performance epilogue; the same can be claimed of *Troilus*'s prologue, with its "Like or find fault . . .

[85] *The Smoking Age* (1617), 159.

[86] *The Costly Whore* (1633), $H4^{b}$. See also the prologue to *The Scholars* in Beaumont, *Poems* (1653), 79: "Profit he knowes none / Unles that of your Approbation, / Which if your thoughts at going out will pay, / Hee'l not looke further for a *Second Day*" [1634–35?]; Jasper Mayne, *The City Match* (1639), $B1^{a}$: "He's One, whose unbought Muse did never feare / An Empty second day, or a thinne share" [1637–38?]; Davenant, *Unfortunate Lovers* (1643), in *Dramatic Works*, 3:84: "the next night when we your money share / He'll shrewdly guess what your opinions are" [1638]; John Tatham, *Ostella* (1650), 111: "Our *Author* likes the *Women* well, and says . . . on *his Day* . . . leave them not behind" [c. 1640–50]; Henry Harington, "On Mr. John Fletcer's . . . Dramaticall Works," in Beaumont and Fletcher, *Comedies* (1647), $F4^{b}$: "You who the Poet and the Actors fright, / Lest that your Censure thin the second night"; John Tatham, *The Fancies Theater* (1649), $(*)7^{a}$: "I shall deeme thee worthy praise, / . . . When Fancie in thy *Theater* doth play, / And wins more credit than a second day"; and Sir John Mennes, *Musarum Deliciae* (1655), 80: "bring them into a Play, / . . . And Ile have the second day" (again, all plainly first-performance speeches). Allusions from the 1650s to benefits are collected in Bentley, *Dramatist*, 134.

[87] Brome, *Novella*, in *Works*, 1:179.

[88] Cartwright, *The Plays and Poems*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 514.

good or bad, 'tis but the chance of war" and *As You Like It*'s hope that the play "may please."[89] *Henry V*'s chorus, encompassing prologue, epilogue, and within-play commentary, is not present at all in quarto; in folio, though it has a powerful effect on the interpretation of the play, the chorus is highly specifically topical (for example, its fifth act reference to the earl of Essex coming back to London with the Irish rebellion "broached" on his sword is relevant at most between March and June 1599), and it may, again, be for a single performance, perhaps for court.[90] Puck closes *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the hope that the players will escape the serpent's tongue (a hiss), in which case "We will make amends ere long"; he also offers the promise "If you pardon, we will mend."[91] Again, this would appear to suggest a first performance, but perhaps here there is even a first-performance offer of revision.

So how should the presence or absence of prologues and epilogues affect our reading of printed plays? Unfortunately, as stage-orations can have a different heritage from the play they are attached to, they cannot be used to make statements about the underlying nature of the text they adjoin. Nevertheless, it can be broadly suggested that a printed text without prologue or epilogue is indicative of an old, tried and tested text, and that a text with one or both of them *may* imply either an early state of the text or an unsuccessful play (though it may also imply simply that the stage-orations have been kept or found). This evidence can be combined with title-page indications. For instance, texts often open by emphasizing to the reader that they are not first-day scripts. Heywood in his *Golden Age*, published in 1611, assures the reader that "my Booke . . . hath already past the approbation of Auditors"; Shirley's *The Wedding* (1629) "hath passed the Stage" [1626–29]; and Shakespeare's Folio plays (1623) "have had their triall already, and stood out all Appeales."[92] The state of text that the reader would, ideally, wish to buy

[89] Shakespeare, *Riverside Shakespeare*, 965, 483, 434.

[90] See Andrew Gurr's introduction to his edition of Shakespeare's *Henry V* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 7. For the argument that the choric apologies pertain to a specific court performance, see G. P. Jones, "*Henry V*: The Chorus and the Audience," *Shakespeare Survey* 31 (1978): 93–104; Lawrence Danson disagrees in "*Henry V*: King, Chorus, and Critics," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34 (1983): 27–43.

[91] Shakespeare, *Riverside Shakespeare*, 280.

[92] Heywood, *Works*, 3:3; Shirley, *Works*, 1:365; Shakespeare, *First Folio*, in *Riverside Shakespeare*, 95. See also Thomas Middleton, *The Family of Love* (1608), in *Works*, 3:7: the play "passed the censure of the stage with a general applause"; Thomas Rawlins, *The Rebellion* (1640), A2^{a}: "This Tragedy had at the presentment a generall Applause"; Massinger, *The Picture* (1630), in *Plays and Poems*, 3:195: "The Play in the presentment found . . . a generall approbation"; Massinger, *The City Madam* (1658), in *Plays and Poems*, 4:19: "this Poem was the object of . . . Commendations, . . . being . . . censured by an unerring Auditory";

seems to have been the text that had been passed by the theater and that was at least at one remove from the author: the approved performing text that had come about by the second day. Printers can lie, of course, or publish pre-performance texts boasting that they are post-performance. But the regular emphasis on the performance reception of printed plays does at least indicate what kind of play a printer would hope to acquire, what was thought "best," and therefore what would, ideally, be supplied. It also explains the worry accorded unperformed texts when published. The epistle to Shakespeare's *Troilus* in its Quarto (b) form (1609) expresses fears that the play might lose sales because it has never been "clapper-clawd"; Davenant worries that his *Cruel Brother* (1630) will not be accepted because it has "received no examination since the Birth" (it has not been performed) and will still be full of its "original Crimes."[93] It was not simply the theater that wanted to unauthor a play through prologue and epilogue: everyone did—the theater's text, not the playwright's text, had come to be valued most.

The main problem with extending this argument is that firm dates cannot be provided for any part of it. There are fewer prologues and epilogues, and less evidence altogether, from the Elizabethan period, which is why the concentration here is of necessity on later practice. While writing on stage-orations I am naturally limited to the plays and to the few poetry- and jest-books that supply them—and, as more surviving prologues and epilogues date from after the 1620s, references are therefore of necessity tilted in favor of Caroline examples. Similarly, although benefits can only be traced to the early seventeenth century, they may date from much earlier. And it is possible that different playhouses had slightly different rules, which is why an accumulation of evidence from as many different sources, theaters, and periods as possible has been provided. It is true, however, that prologues and epilogues dating from before 1600 are generally more brief and vague in remit and that the importance of prologues and epilogues seems to have grown over time, perhaps with the growth of the number and size of permanent theaters. It is hard to say more than that. One other caveat should also be raised: that prologues and epilogues for traveling players and aca-

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and John Kirke, *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1638), A3^{b}: "it received the rights of a good Play, . . . which were Applauses & Commendations."

[93] Shakespeare, *Riverside Shakespeare*, 526; Davenant, *Dramatic Works*, 1:117. The question as to whether Shakespeare's *Troilus* had actually been privately performed is a complex one; no satisfactory solution has been found for the different information offered in variant Quarto title pages and in the Stationers' Register. Here I am specifically interested in the way the writer of the epistle presents his belief that the play has never been mounted.

demic players will have taken a different form. A play performed by strollers would have had to undergo a judgmental "first" performance every time a new town was reached; stage-orations for such plays were probably intended to be spoken in each new venue. More prologues and epilogues survive for academic plays and for a similar reason: the plays themselves were performed, generally, only once.

What seems to be the case, at least after 1600 or so, is that prologues and epilogues indicated a special state of text-in-performance at which judgment could take place. They are there for new actors, and they are there for new plays—they are there for occasions when rejection is possible. Principally, they are there for a play on the first day of its performance, when the theater and all its fictions assume responsibility for the text, the actual writer having been demoted by the theatrical process itself. And, as first performances were always judgmental performances, or "trials," it is possible, I have argued, that on at least some of those trials the text might have been taken from the author and handed over to the audience, with that audience emerging as judges and perhaps minor revisers of the text. This is obviously contrary to the idea held by some editors that the premier marked the time when textual "collaboration" stopped and textual "corruption" began.[94] For I am suggesting that well before the interregnum the first performance may have been the occasion on which the audience's "collaboration" set the final touches to the text: the audience's contributions may have been an accepted (if resented) part of the process of textual revision. Were this the case, it would mean, too, that starting from some point in history (perhaps the institution of the benefit performance), playtexts were potentially fluid between the first and second performance; indeed, some texts that survive in more than one version could be showing the result of speedy first- to second-performance "revision." Even without revision, it seems to have been usual for plays to exist in more than one form—one with stage-orations and one without—and I hope this article has suggested some reasons why.[95]

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[94] Gary Taylor and John Jowett, *Shakespeare Reshaped* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 237.

[95] This article would never have been completed without the help of Professor Alan Dessen (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). I am enormously grateful to him for his advice—and patience—over the last few months. I also extend my thanks to the British Academy, which kindly provided me with a travel grant to give this article as a paper at the Shakespeare Association of America conference.