Playgoing in Shakespeare's London

This is a newly revised edition of Andrew Gurr's classic account of the people for whom Shakespeare wrote his plays. Gurr assembles evidence from the writings of the time to describe the physical structure of the playhouses, the services provided in the auditorium, the cost of a ticket and a cushion, the size of the crowds, the smells, the pickpockets, and the collective feelings generated by the plays.

As well as revising and adding new material which has emerged since the second edition, Gurr develops new sections. He considers the difference between Shakespearean and modern thinking about early staging, the complex historical process which established the permanent playhouses, and the development of a distinctly different acting style in the open-air playhouses from that of the indoor halls. Fifty new entries have been added to the list of playgoers and there are a dozen fresh quotations about the experience of playgoing.

Andrew Gurr is Emeritus Professor, University of Reading. His many books include *The Shakespearean Stage 1574–1642* (third edition 1993), *Writers in Exile, Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (second edition 1996), *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (1996), and (with Mariko Ichikawa) *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* (2000).

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Third edition

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'The action of the theatre, though modern states esteem it merely ludicrous unless it be satirical and biting, was carefully watched by the ancients, so that it might improve mankind in virtue; and indeed many wise men and great philosophers have thought it to the mind as the bow to the fiddle; and certain it is, though a great secret in nature, that the minds of men in company are more open to affections and impressions than when alone.'

Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*

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Preface to third edition

Sydney's Darling Harbour contains a Chinese 'Garden of Friendship' created by its sister-city Guangzhou in 1988 as a symbol of friendship between China and Australia. At the highest point of its beautifully intricate hectare of trees, rocks, pools and traditional houses stands a three-storeyed, gold-tiled pavilion. It is known in English as the 'Clear View Pavilion', because of its position as the best place to see the surrounding countryside. Its Chinese name is the Gurr.

This third edition of *Playgoing* is in its own way the book's highest and certainly its final storey. It now offers, thanks to the many helpful criticisms it has received and the development its subject has undergone since the first edition in 1987, my own clearest view of the complex process and experience of early modern playgoing and its many differences from the modern experience as I understand it. It continues to offer no pretensions to authority. A crowd, the best word for the complex of individuals making up the early modern theatre audiences, could never be described or explained with any adequacy, either in its composition, its collective mental structure and actions, or the history and mind-set of its individual components. This book is therefore necessarily a subjective and impressionistic picturing of those gatherings of Londoners and visitors who saw the original performances of the plays written for them by Shakespeare and his peers and successors.

Essentially it is a history, because in the remarkable seventy-five years between 1567 and 1642 not only did the kind of play offered at the different playhouses undergo some extraordinary transformations thanks to the creations of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher and others, but the conditions of playgoing changed radically too. In the first years it was afflicted by massive hostility from the succession of magnates who served as Lord Mayor of London. Preachers consistently condemned it, and it continued to be disliked by the more strait-laced members of society at all of its many levels. For all that, its development followed a remarkably steep upward curve. In 1594 two lords on the Privy Council, the monarch's chief governing body, intervened to foster its growth in quality and to secure it a fixed place to perform in

the suburbs of London. When King James replaced Elizabeth in 1603 he wasted little time making himself and his family patrons of the four companies then licensed to perform in London, a mighty affirmation for the rising status of playing. In time the leading playhouse became the most vaunted showplace after the court for anyone with high social ambitions. Under King Charles the whole business of playmaking gradually grew so close to its patrons the royal family that it had to share in the king's downfall in 1642. What it felt like to attend a performance through those seven decades altered with this sequence of growth and elevation.

The term 'Shakespearean' is used here with deliberate looseness. It covers a period starting when Shakespeare was only three years old in far-away Stratford, and ends twenty-six years after he died. The generosity of giving it his name is justified by the scale of his achievement, not least in the long duration of the company he helped to found and which ran as the theatre's leading light for forty-eight years up to the general closure of 1642. Ultimately the peculiar distinction of Shakespeare's plays was the magnet attracting this accumulation of bits and pieces of evidence and inspiring the labour of trying to assemble them in a coherent shape.

Most of the bits and pieces, while they are invoked throughout the book, are also bagged up together in the two appendices. Appendix 1 names and describes the 250 real persons known to have attended plays on some occasion through the period, augmenting the 196 named in the second edition of 1996 by 25 per cent. Appendix 2 quotes as many as possible of the hundreds of contemporary references which have something significant to say about the early audiences, real or fictional, adding 14 to the 210 in the list of 1996. The references in Appendix 2 are set out in their chronological sequence, affirming the process of historical change in as precise an order as the evidence for their provenance permits. Wherever such comments are cited in the text, the reference is to their number in Appendix 2.

There are too many people than I can name here who deserve my thanks for help with the work and the time that lies beneath this book, but some mention of the main contributors is essential. In the twenty years since I began, too many have died (Charles Barber, Philip Brockbank, Theo Crosby, E. R. Gurr, John Orrell, Alan Wardman, Sam Wanamaker). More happily, others are still there giving help, notably Mary Blackstone, Al Braunmuller, Cedric Brown, Martin Butler, Bernard Capp, John R. Elliott Jr, Henk Gras, E. A. Gurr, Christopher Hardman, Richard Hosley, Mariko Ichikawa, Grace Ioppolo, Mac Jackson, Ron Knowles, Ian Laurenson, Cameron Louis,

Carolyn Lyle, Scott McMillin, Michael Neill, Barbara Palmer, Alan Pritchard and Michael Shapiro. Special thanks to John Astington for his assiduous checks on my accuracy and reliability, not least with the illustrations. For this third edition I should like to add my particular thanks to Charles Whitney, who not only gave me good advice about various features of the book but supplied names and descriptions for several of the items in the two appendices. And as always, the quietest arm-twister in the business, Sarah Stanton of Cambridge University Press.

ANDREW GURR
Reading, 2003

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