Introduction

This book uncovers a mode of reception that became second nature to the audiences of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and that entertained and fostered their creations. It is the first book-length historical study of early responses to English Renaissance drama. That mode of reception finds many expressions, from commonplace book to verse to memoir to tossed-off allusion in the course of speaking or writing. Whether or not it begins with powerful emotion, the outcome tends to be a form of use and application, as myriad-minded audiences discover the copious resources of performance or text for their diverse purposes, lessons, and interests. It is a mode that cannot be well appreciated through the traditional approach of performance history that has dominated study of post-1660 response to Renaissance drama. For the emphasis in the earlier period is as much on consumption as on production, on appropriation as on contemplation, and on creative re-performance as on creative performance.

It is important for anyone interested in Renaissance drama to recognize and understand this predominant, many-faceted model of early reception. The fact that it became relatively marginal in later centuries has made it easy for scholars of many stripes to overlook it, to avoid considering the audience's role in dramatic history, and to attribute our own interpretations of plays to "the" audience as an historical chimera. This mode of interpretation-as-application by definition empowers audiences, and seems to have played a significant if unobtrusive role in the emergence of modern attitudes, sensibilities, and institutions. It may also turn out to provide a perspective on the possible roles of theatre and other art forms in society today. Finally, appreciation of this mode through intimate acquaintance with some of the earliest audience members may lead to a new perspective on production, by 180 degrees. It requires us to reconsider players' working conditions: how early audiences stimulated them with challenging, complex demands, requiring us to contemplate,

that is, a new conception of what Shakespeare or other dramatists set out to do.

The great bulk of early evidence on response to drama explicitly or implicitly concerns ways dramatic experience shapes purpose, discourse, and action. Recognizing this became my key for understanding the drama in its time. My focus here is on responses of those not professionally engaged in the theatre, including playgoers, play readers, and in a few cases, those probably exposed only to kinds of theatre publicity. This book is not a study of reputation, of marketing, of antitheatrical literature, of demographics, or of playgoing practices *per se*. It takes up responses among playwrights to supplement understanding of nonprofessional reception. It concerns response to performed and published commercial drama in London before 1660 as registered in a wide range of the historical record. By contextualizing the nuggets of evidence in biographical and historical contexts informed by critical theory, this study explores ways audience members become agents in the shaping and realizing of meaning, subjectivity, a range of individual and corporate purposes, and ultimately dramatic production and public discourse.

Such a survey is potentially as heterogeneous as the audience itself. And the conclusions always depend on the extent and kind of available evidence. Some substantial, inward-looking cases based on self-speaking or biography draw us into the unique experience and mentality of exceptional individuals such as Richard Norwood and Joan Drake. Others merely contribute to generalizations about the priorities of extant responders in relation to particular dramatic material and to impressions about the range of overall response. Most responses considered here tell us something about both individual particularity and larger patterns. But after all the scholarly attention given to collective response, demonstrating the actual diversity and creativity of early reception is itself a major goal of this study.

There are several other major goals as well. One is simply the logical correlative: to argue that players deliberately offered material for moral and practical benefit and use, accommodating and facilitating the diverse, creative applications audiences looked for. Another concerns consequences, to suggest that audiencs' diverse, pragmatic interpretations contributed in their own ways to the development of public discourse and ultimately a public sphere. Other goals are more specific and localized, aiming to find patterns in the fragmentary record where possible and to deepen understanding of the distinctiveness of early modern response. I theorize the development of a liberated pattern of reception that first becomes visible in the record with response to Christopher Marlowe's

Tamburlaine plays. That crucially important pattern facilitated both deeper emotional involvement and more imaginative interpretation, challenging players with more substantial consumer demands. And other kinds of important patterns concern characteristic ranges of response to major characters, and the orientations and concerns of particular social groups, such as members of the Inns of Court, workers, and gentlewomen. At opportune moments, I develop distinctions between early modern response and later, more fully aestheticized and commodified norms, distinctions that attempt to clarify both the particular nature of individual responses under discussion and their significance in the history of reception. But those distinctions remain tentative, and are matters of emphasis rather than essence. The remainder of this introduction describes the point of departure of this study, explains its methodology, develops its leading ideas further, and provides a guide to its organization.

The citation of dramatic material in the course of realizing some larger pleasure or purpose, particularly through allusion, is the most typical kind of surviving early modern response and requires more serious attention than it has ever been given. Many audience members cite elements of drama in practical situations to help achieve goals or to express themselves, and some responses allow us to infer or actually to see how emotional experience of drama catalyzes the development of subjectivity and moral commitment through audience members' creative agency. But the dominant form of study of early modern dramatic response over the last sixty years concentrates on the in-theatre experiences of playgoers addressed collectively and responding uniformly. The method is formal or phenomenological, analyzing how the text or performance constructs audiences who perceive largely with innocent eyes from an abstract subject position. Often, little flexibility remains for consideration of uncued audience agency in the dramatic transaction that creates meaning.[1] The producer acts on the consumer to maintain attention and guide response – to manage or "manipulate" it as if playgoing were primarily a form of discipline.[2]

Such studies affirm the evident truth that players generally, though by no means always, address their audiences collectively, and that audiences respond in kind. They are of tremendous value both as interpretations that trace in an ideal audience "the subtile tracks of your engagement" with a performance, to use playwright James Shirley's 1647 phrase, and that contribute to a history of the ways production has encountered reception.[3] Yet, even working within the dominant model of production-oriented reception study, some scholars have taken seriously Marlowe's

invitation to audiences in the 1590 Prologue to his Tamburlaine plays to respond "as you please," suggesting how his plays represented a major historical intervention because they invite and challenge audiences to respond imaginatively and diversely.

The historical study of audiences, of course, works outside this production-oriented framework. The single indispensable foundation of the study of early modern dramatic audiences and of this book is Andrew Gurr's *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*,[4] one of the greatest achievements of modern theatre history. Gurr provides a comprehensive overview, a definitive narrative history, a model of judicious and insightful inference, and a definitive compilation of primary and secondary sources that enable more specialized exploration of reception. And drama being a performing art, Gurr like his worthy predecessors[5] and like production-oriented reception critics focuses exclusively on playgoing. That exclusive focus also requires supplement.

For the total body of evidence of response does not endorse the prevailing degree of scholarly emphasis on response within the physical confines of the theatre. Whatever the degree of diverse response in the theatre, early modern audiences did not on the whole share the interest of literary and theatre scholars in defining and exploring through writing a phenomenon of primary theatrical experience, that contained within the theatre building during performance. They were not generally interested in performance history. The relative bulk of evidence pertaining to kinds of secondary reception indicates that they had different priorities. Neither the word "performance" nor any other word during the period possessed a strong valence of reference to such live presentation.[6] Eyewitness accounts seldom report or recreate in-theatre experiences simply for their own sakes, but are motivated by particular purposes and are generally detached and reportorial. Often these accounts cannot be distinguished in kind from accounts of non-dramatic events or of texts. Many dramatic allusions by known playgoers may have just as well come from reading as from playgoing. Conversely, testimonies of powerful response in the theatre are often unconnected to specific dramatic material – plot, character, or language – in identifiable plays. And the more substantial the response, the more the primary experience tends to have developed and evolved in the course of life. Evidence of response cuts across the venerable binary of stage *vs.* page, of theatrical presentation vs. literary art, performance *vs.* text, play going *vs.* reading.

The strong edifice of Gurr's and others' historical study of playgoing and of primary theatrical experience therefore calls for extension. Letting

questions arise from the historical record leads in exciting directions. It helps us recognize that experience of drama, created by authors, players, and audiences together through dramatic transactions, is rarely confined to the moments and the places of performance. Playgoers carry their theatrical experiences with them from the theatre and continue to absorb, assimilate, and apply them. In the early modern period this process generated much of the publicity of the stage, not the least being imitation and casual discussion of dramatic material. Most readers of printed playbooks, which advertised their stage provenance, can be said to comprise a secondary dramatic audience, whether or not they were also playgoers. And not only was the theatre thereby dispersed through many sites, but like other kinds of experience the release of response in the theatre registers the confluence of many forces sustained over time, deriving from playgoers' individual as well as collective perceptions, memories, needs, purposes, and interests as well as from the performance itself. A collective roar, sigh, or wave of laughter in the playhouse may be generated by many diverse, individualized inflections of feeling released by the stage action, and then dissolve again into many, inflections that players would have ignored at their peril. Dramatic reception is an extended and dispersed set of processes and practices.

An inclusive definition of what constitutes dramatic reception reveals diversity more than the collective or unitary response that has dominated audience study up until recently. This is not to deny Gurr's distinction between an early modern "audience" and a contemporary "spectator": " 'Audience' is a collective term for a group of listeners. A 'spectator' is an individual seeing for him or herself."[7] Early modern theatre audiences may have responded more collectively than contemporary ones, but they did not always respond so, and their responses evolved afterwards in individual ways. The issue itself comprises a major subject of contention in Anthony Dawson and Paul Yachnin's searching discussions in *The Culture of Playgoing*, with the latter arguing that performances often encouraged individual perspectives even within the theatre.[8] Here I try to make a virtue of the necessity imposed by the evidence, expanding the goal beyond identification of primary and of unitary theatrical response. This study launches a more inclusive inquiry into dramatic response as an extended process, one focused on the experiences of many individuals in places ranging from the playhouse itself to a reverie of Falstaff and Doll in the Cape Verde Islands (Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* 1657). It considers a panoply of individual audience members' disparate experiences and applications in and out of the theatre,

experiences of page and publicity as well as stage, experiences embedded in the course of life and often expressed through allusions. Much admiration has been spent on the theatre's ability to appeal to a socially diverse clientele, but this project makes it possible to consider for the first time particular responses of women and members of the lower social orders. More generally, it provides a new dimension in which to understand the theatre not only as a dissolver or harmonizer of diverse social interests but also as a facilitator of them.

Many allusions have drawbacks that make theatre historians queasy: they often include no certification either that they really refer to a play rather than to some other source, or that the alluder actually saw or read the play in question, rather than simply heard about it. The first difficulty has to be approached case by case, with caution and care, to select allusions that are both interesting in themselves and most likely to have been based on experience of playgoing or play-reading. But both drawbacks are serious only when the subject of study is a single or a small number of cases. By and large, the people whom we know alluded to plays must have been among those who saw or read plays, even if a particular case may be questionable. So the general ways one finds plays interpreted, appropriated, or applied in allusions must illustrate the ways those who saw or read plays responded to them. Further, allusions whose sources are not plays but merely the publicity of the stage in the form of reports or discussions (i.e. tertiary evidence) may also be valuable indications of response patterns, such as the servant "I. M." 's remarkable allusion to Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost* (chapter 4). For theatre publicity, including conversation, can itself be an important aspect of response. Since the allusion, then, is such a fundamental part of the body of evidence for response, historians are bound to take it seriously, warts and all. Ignoring allusions out of scholarly rigor would be unscholarly.

A passing allusion seems far from what we in an age of reflective, mobilized, and professionalized interpretation could take seriously. But part of the value of the allusion lies in its implicit record of a response process – of dramatic experience recalled and applied freely and creatively for particular purposes in the course of life. Allusions are interpretations, though more in the sense of a musician's interpretation of a score, and as Joseph Pucci argues, perhaps more than any other rhetorical figure they demand that we be powerful readers and face the music to construe them.[9]

Even though it moves us away from the playhouse as it gives new insights into secondary forms of response, an expanded study of reception

is also crucial to understanding what went on in the playhouse or the study. For while a good allusion can seldom reveal how the writer actually responded to a specific piece of dramatic material during the performance or the reading, it can reveal what the writer would have considered a reasonable or at least a possible response. It allows us to make inferences about the beginning stages of the response process, as long as we are able to jettison the requirement for positive knowledge and remain open to the range of interpretive tools that ordinarily aid powerful readers. In that way, the larger field of evidence also illuminates the reciprocal influence of players and playgoers, who together appear to have developed powerful response patterns that shaped theatrical transactions and the plays themselves. Allusions may bring us closer to understanding the audience's role in launching the great age of early modern drama.

New critical perspectives offer us new purchases on the evidence, and cue and invigorate this inquiry. I assume that the study of dramatic response should benefit from a range of critical tools just as does study of the drama itself. Dawson and Yachnin provide a salutary precedent, using performance study and historicism to move discussion of playhouse dynamics decisively to a new level of significance. They probe issues crucial to the experience of theatre that animate several discussions here: engagement and detachment, unity and diversity of response, and the subjective experience of audiences.

Crucial to my study is a sense of response processes, of ways audience members move across the gulf from initial experience to discursive interpretation or application. Joseph Roach shows how theatrical productions can shape social exchanges far outside the playhouse in his study of cultural memory and social performance. Huston Diehl offers a powerful explanatory theory, positing a Protestant dramatic aesthetic, a discipline of reformed seeing that seeks to master the challenge of the stage's idolatrous potential for benefit and use. Diehl's insights are especially illuminating when joined with those of Cynthia Marshall's psychoanalytic *The Shattering of the Self*. Marshall emphasizes the audience's agency in creating an affective imaginative space through which dramatic performance is realized, and develops Lacanian perspectives on responses to sex and violence as grounded in early modern modes of subjectivity.[10] With or without a specific psychoanalytic grounding, cases explored here suggest how the blissful power of the theatre to amaze, enchant, or shatter the self could overwhelm, complement, or contribute to its power to instruct, fashion, or edify the self inwardly. The seizures, ravishments, intoxications, and cures depicted on Renaissance stages find

counterparts in response. Tanya Pollard shows how the theatre claimed powers to transform audiences by acting on their bodies just as it represented its characters as physiologically transformed. Humanism and Protestantism demanded that the theatre improve its audiences and help them resist the corrupting or idolizing power of its images: paralleling to some degree Friedrich Nietzsche's Dionysian and Apollonian principles of tragedy,[11] the theatre's presentational power to transform or dissolve the psyches of audience members also challenged them to frame their own independent, critical reflections or applications.

The growth of the history of reading and of reception, finally, challenges dramatic scholarship to reevaluate the importance and diversity of early audience response. Richard Dutton shows that to meet the demand for topical content under the condition of censorship, playwrights used incomplete suggestions that could be interpreted diversely. Robert Weimann explores the broader sixteenth-century crisis of authority that empowered heterogeneous audiences as independent evaluators.[12] In the early modern period, reception of texts and performances was the most critical point at which assumptions of commonality and the interests and perspectives of individuals and social segments collided. The history of reading shows that early modern readers were markedly interested in benefit and use, in practical applications, as books were often "studied for action."[13] Sasha Roberts's study of responses to Shakespeare's poems emphasizes the resourcefulness of readers who revised manuscripts to suit themselves and whose commonplacing rearranged contents under moral headings and implied a decontextualizing reading process. "Early modern literary culture," she concludes, "revolved around multiple agents, not the solitary figure of the author."[14] The vital interplay of players and audiences in the theatre may itself partly reflect such patterns of reception.

Drama as such equipment for living fosters the characteristic performativity of much early dramatic response. That performativity both provokes and supports the motto of the Globe Theatre, *Totus mundus agit histrionem*, "All the world plays the actor," the sense that characters, players, and playgoers are all encompassed in one articulated theatrical continuum, a *theatrum mundi*, not entirely divided into knower and known. The structure of the medieval stage figured a map of the world long before the Globe got its name.[15] The earlier humanist's notion of theatre as encyclopedia was a figurative one to which the stage plays of the sixteenth century added the concrete sense, and that combination of senses helped make Renaissance drama more vital and significant, affecting even natural philosophy.[16] Playgoers or play-readers such as

John Donne, Aemilia Lanyer, Edmund Gayton, and John Milton all acknowledge that the world is "this wide and universal theatre" (*As You Like It*).[17] Of an actor, someone (perhaps John Webster) said, "All men haue beene of his occupation: and indeed, what hee doth fainedly that doe others essentially."[18]

The implication is not necessarily that many audience members viewed their lives and all human behavior simply as a series of roles – as compelling as that view may be in the understanding of Prince Hal and certain other dramatic characters. But the concept effectively aligns production and consumption by emphasizing how the physical theatre space facilitated interaction between player and playgoer, art and life. Play and performance in the *theatrum mundi* became ways of extending the self and exploring the bounds of the possible.[19] With its multi-faceted resonance in Stoic, satiric, Neoplatonic, and Protestant discourses of the period,[20] *theatrum mundi* is the most apt framework for many early modern dramatic responses, even though its emphasis on practice and its wide applicability align dramatic response with other kinds of experience. This framework parallels the orientation of today's emerging field of performance studies more than traditional performance history: the former recognizes "a pervasive theatricality common to stage and world," a theatricality by which "identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes"[21] – citations that include dramatic allusions.

The context of *theatrum mundi* also offers a perspective on the nature of the dramatic transaction between producers and consumers of drama as an aspect of the early modern market. Economic criticism has provided a strong basis for consideration of the audience's roles in the emerging capitalist marketplace of theatrical exchange. Thomas Dekker called the theatre "your poet's Royal Exchange," where they "barter away that light commodity called words,"[22] but Renaissance drama was not a "commodity" in the fully modern sense of an item set to sale in a capitalist market that separates producers and consumers. Remnants of feudal and guild relationships in theatre economics remained important, as Roslyn Knutson shows.[23] In the transitional early modern sense, "commodity" can mean "a quality or condition of things, in relation to the desires or needs of men . . . conveniency, suitability, fitting utility"[24] – a quality or condition that "accommodates" desires and needs. Player Timothy Reed was represented as saying in defense of the theatre in 1641,

> We are very necessary and commodious to all people: strangers . . . Citizens . . . Gallants . . . the Learned . . . Gentlewomen . . . [and] the ignorant . . . Well! In

a word we are so needful for the Common good, that in some respect it were almost a sinne to put us downe.[25]

Renaissance drama often appears, from the perspective of early reception, to accommodate its audiences' diverse interests and purposes, to offer them resources for the pleasurable and "commodious" performance of life in a theatre of the world that encompasses players and playgoers rather than separating them. A commodious theatre like Reed's purports to be in "the Common good." The early modern theatre facilitated an interactive, use-oriented aesthetic, and a substantial part of its authority lay in its ability to disseminate meaning as well as to allocate and control it.

Implicit in that dissemination is an acknowledgment of an authority that the audience wields in the dramatic transaction and ultimately in the process of production. By pointing to the links between performance on stage and in life, the *theatrum mundi* metaphor suggests that productions were commodities encouraging forms of consumption that could themselves be strikingly productive. The early theatre rose above contemporary moral and religious concerns about what would later be called "commodity fetishism"[26] not so much by appealing to a modern realm of autonomous aesthetic experience or of distinctively literary experience as by offering commodious experiences that could be taken up creatively in audiences' public and private lives. The theatre's power derived partly from its ability to offer potential meanings that gave rise to unpredictable actualizations.[27]

Of course audiences of all periods and different media make allusions and engage with art forms in productive and creative ways. And of course the early modern period shows an especially deep and wide appreciation of beauty. But the fuller development of the commodity form and autonomous aesthetics, along with the rise of criticism and author-focused or authorial reading, could separate artistic representations from their audiences and from other spheres of experience in ways that did not obtain to the same degree at this time. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) provides a handy philosophical reference point for the full establishment of the aesthetic sense as a distinct and separate area of experience, an establishment that influenced the Romantics' fully imagined Bard. But long before that, John Dryden's Restoration provision of "a critical vocabulary of wit, taste, and talent" in his creation of an English literary canon centered on Jonson, Shakespeare, and Milton attempted "to pry aesthetic matters away from their imbrication in