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# Taverns, Theaters, Publics: The Intertheatrical Politics of Caroline Drama

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In James Shirley's *Love's Cruelty* (first performed 1631), Sebastian asks the courtier Bovaldo, "shall we to a tavern"? As he explains, the "court's too open."<sup>1</sup> Only by leaving the court can the men "speak . . . what [they] think" and "not fear to talk" (3.1, 224; 3.1, 225). Since what they plan to discuss is the Duke's unwanted, unrelenting pursuit of Sebastian's daughter, they have good reason to fear being overheard. "[When] we give our thoughts / Articulate sound," another courtier warns Sebastian, "we must distinguish hearers" (1.2, 202). The question is, how and where to do this best? That the public space of a commercial tavern might offer greater protection than the court or the home is an assumption that fits with recent work on the history of privacy.<sup>2</sup> It is not that the tavern is assumed to be a more democratic space than the court, allowing for greater freedom of speech and association (like Mistress Quickly's Eastcheap establishment), but

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1. *Love's Cruelty*, in *The Dramatic Works and Poems of James Shirley*, ed. William Gifford and Alexander Dyce, vol. 2 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 1.2, 205. The edition is not lined, so I have provided act, scene, and page numbers. Subsequent citations are to this edition.

2. See especially Erica Longfellow, "Public, Private, and the Household in Early Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006): 313–34; Lena Cowen Orlin, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and "Response: Private Lives, Public Performance, and Rites of Passage," in *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, ed. Betty S. Travitsky and Adele F. Seeff (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994); Alan Stewart, "The Early Modern Closet Discovered," *Representations* 50 (1995): 76–100; Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991); and Barbara Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *Historical Journal* 33 (1990): 259–81.

that it shares certain features with the outdoor settings Mary Crane has argued were the only spaces “real privacy” was “attainable” in the period.<sup>3</sup> At a tavern, individuals would not be observed by their own domestic servants, as they would risk being at home, or even necessarily by their own neighbors, but by drawers, vintners, and others to whom they could conceivably remain unknown. The tavern’s hubbub, moreover, might help to conceal specific conversations.<sup>4</sup> Sebastian’s suggested change of location therefore makes sense. Yet the crucial element of this scene is *not* the realization of privacy, but its denial. Immediately upon entering the tavern, Sebastian wonders whether they “might with more discretion have sent for wine / To my own lodgings” (3.1, 221). His fear seems to prove prophetic when the men are interrupted first by a fiddler and then a juggler. “This is the trick of taverns, when men desire to be private,” Sebastian grumbles (3.1, 222). And later, “They will be deceived that choose a tavern for privacy” (3.1, 223).

All of these spaces—the court, a tavern, Sebastian’s “own lodging”—mingle publicness and privateness, openness and discretion, in ways that must be negotiated and assessed, and *Love’s Cruelty* is deeply interested in the question of what happens when such negotiations go wrong.<sup>5</sup> It is striking, however, the extent to which Sebastian and Bovaldo’s experience seems to be the common lot of taverngoers on the Caroline stage. Long imagined as a site of lively disorder, by the mid-seventeenth century, the tavern takes on a somewhat different dramatic function. In these later plays, as opposed to in earlier productions by John Lyly, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and others, the tavern is often represented as a place where men and sometimes women go to be “private” with one another, but where their expectations of privacy are repeatedly, often spectacularly, upended. These scenes draw attention to changing conceptualizations of the public and the private in the period, making visible questions about who has the right to occupy which urban spaces on what terms, and about what happens when the answers to these questions are unclear. But just as interesting as what these scenes do is the fact that they do it so often. Tavern scenes like the one in *Love’s Cruelty* are far

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3. Mary Crane, “Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces in Early Modern England,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* (2009): 4–22, at 5.

4. According to John Earle, taverns are where “Men come . . . to make merry, but indeed make a noise, and this Musicke above is answered with the clinking below.” *Microcosmographie* (London, 1628), sig. B5r.

5. The most dramatic instance of this is when the newly married Bellamente catches his wife, Clariana, in bed with his best friend after a servant tells him that he has spied them through “a small cranny” in the wall of “her chamber lock’t” (3.4, 236, 235). Rushing in upon them, pistol drawn, Bellamente does not attack, but instead orders his friend to “get into that closet” while his wife “dresse[s] . . . the bed a little”; he then calls his servant back into the room to accuse him of having lied (4.1, 239). Bellamente’s elaborately stage-managed scene succeeds in compelling the servant seemingly to unsee what he saw: “I beseech you sir, by my life I thought I saw ’em” (241).

from uncommon. They appear in a number of plays written by different authors for various companies and theaters. Across these many performances, the tavern, and particularly taverns' so-called "private rooms," begin to serve as the location for a theatrical set piece or theatergram—that is, a bit of action that gets repeated so often as to be recognizable as a discrete element of commercial playing.<sup>6</sup> Tavern scenes allowed playwrights to explore how, as Steven Mullaney and Angela Vanhaelen put it, the "sociality of space" and "spatiality of the social" were entangled in London, particularly in the fashionable West End in the decade before the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> This essay will examine some of the ways in which the Caroline theater theorized its own capacity to inculcate certain types of community and allegiance through its imaginative representation of taverns' private rooms. Like playhouses, taverns were places where opportunities for display and secrecy were not distinct so much as intertwined, where patrons—many of whom frequented both—could be anonymous in public or choose to make themselves known to one another in particular ways.<sup>8</sup> Plays by Shirley, Richard Brome, Thomas Nabbes, and others ask us to think about the various forms of association made possible in these similar, though also quite distinct, places.

My investigation of these scenes is rooted in a set of assumptions about theater's role in the production of collective identities, or publics, in seventeenth-century England. That it is possible to speak of an early modern public has, by now, become fairly well established. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin, among others, have all demonstrated how certain categories, concepts, and themes from Jürgen Habermas's influential theoretical model might be applicable to the period.<sup>9</sup> In Lake and Pincus's account, the early mod-

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6. See Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). I am building here on her analysis and on William N. West's discussion of "Intertheatricality" in *Early Modern Theatricality*, ed. Henry S. Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 151–72.

7. See Steven Mullaney and Angela Vanhaelen, "Introduction: Making Space Public in Early Modern Europe—Performance, Geography, Privacy," in *Making Space Public in Early Modern Europe: Performance, Geography, Privacy*, ed. Angela Vanhaelen and Joseph P. Ward (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1–16, at 4.

8. The relationship I am charting between playhouse and private room is in many ways analogous to that which David Scott Kastan examines in "Workshop and/as Playhouse: Comedy and Commerce in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*," in *Staging the Renaissance*, ed. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York: Routledge, 1991), 151–63.

9. I am paraphrasing Lake and Pincus's characterization of their work as considering "some variations on and applications of some basic themes and categories from Habermas, with a rather different account and chronology." See Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, "Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006): 270–92, at 273. On early modern publics, see (in addition to Lake and Pincus) Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin, eds., *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, Forms of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2010), and Paul Yachnin and Marlene Eberhart, eds., *Forms of Association: Making Publics in Early Modern*

ern public sphere begins with a highly directed set of appeals to the people, as elements of Elizabeth's regime used print and manuscript to mobilize popular opinion for specific ends. During the Civil War, this public would become "virtually self-sustaining," as the proliferation of printed political news, pamphlets, poems, and so on left the state unable to reverse the process it had unwittingly begun.<sup>10</sup> While the theater does not figure in Lake and Pincus's analysis,<sup>11</sup> it has been central to the work of Paul Yachnin, Jeff S. Doty, Steven Mullaney, András Kiséry, and others (including Lake himself), who have examined its role in "public-making."<sup>12</sup> For many, though importantly not all, of these critics, this has meant reasserting the centrality of affective, emotional response to rational judgment.<sup>13</sup> If a public is a space where private individuals come together to engage in rational debate, then the emotive responses drama solicits and produces should be understood as integral to, rather than bracketed off from, such debate. I wholeheartedly agree with this analysis as it applies to the theater of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, which figures centrally in each of these studies. But for understanding theatrical public-

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*Europe* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015). On the multiplicity of publics, see esp. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), and Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). All of this work stems from Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

10. Lake and Pincus, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 280.

11. Until recently, analysis of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century public-making has tended to focus on print and literary culture while having relatively little to say about theatrical performance. This is in part because Habermas himself placed such heavy emphasis on reading and literacy (he famously posits the existence of a "literary precursor" to the public sphere and calls the earliest instantiation of a "bourgeois" public sphere a "reading public"); he also explicitly excludes England's public theater from his theoretical model. See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 29, 23, 38). For Steven Mullaney, Habermas's metaphors nonetheless reveal theater to be "the ghost in Habermas's literary machine, despite his efforts to exorcise it." See Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 159.

12. "Public-making" is Paul Yachnin's phrase in "Performing Publicity," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 28 (2010): 201–19. See also Jeff S. Doty, "Shakespeare's *Richard II*, 'Popularity,' and the Early Modern Public Sphere," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61 (2010): 183–205; Steven Mullaney, "What's Hamlet to Habermas? Spatial Literacy, Theatrical Publication and the Publics of the Early Modern Stage," in Vanhaelen and Ward, *Making Space Public*, 17–40; Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions*; and András Kiséry, *Hamlet's Moment: Drama and Political Knowledge in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Lake, *Bad Queen Bess? Libels, Secret Histories and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

13. Yachnin offers a model of public life in which "people bring with them into public space and have the courage to act out what we would normally call their private selves and personal histories, their unique emotional and cognitive qualities, and how they see others, themselves, and the world" ("Performing Publicity," 204). Doty writes that "Shakespeare's reversals of sympathy are not only aesthetic effects: by balancing emotive responses to the characters against one another, Shakespeare forces playgoers into acts of judgment and political analysis" (Shakespeare's *Richard II*, 200).

making in the 1630s—the decade just before the moment that, for Lake and Pincus, marks a key transition point in the development of early modern publics and political economy—I think it needs adjustment. Because the plays performed in 1620s and 1630s London were written several decades later than Shakespeare’s, and according to somewhat different theatrical fashions and practices, they perform their public-making work in necessarily different ways. This is not a qualitative judgment. I am not arguing that Shakespeare’s plays had the power to move their audiences while Caroline drama did not, nor am I suggesting that Caroline audiences were merely escapist, decadent pleasure seekers.<sup>14</sup> Rather, I want to put forward a model of theatrical public-making that is rooted in the specificity of the Caroline theatrical moment, and to argue that by the 1630s, the accumulated thickness of the dramatic repertoire enabled new ways of interpreting and making use of theatrical material. The tavern scenes help to make these differences vivid.

### I. “A FAIRER ROOM, AND MORE PRIVATE”

In sixteenth-century theater, taverns tend to be sites of carefully choreographed chaos, where customers, drawers, and vintners are in near constant motion, the noises they produce forming a kind of comic commercial hum (think of the drawer’s cry, “Anon, anon,” that Hal and Poins drum up for their own amusement in *1 Henry IV*).<sup>15</sup> Later comedies and tragicomedies represent taverns as similarly noisy spaces, crowded with patrons, employees, and itinerant musicians, but they place new emphasis on what seems to have been a basic feature of London’s taverns for centuries, the “private room.” A typical London tavern might have a main room, or “tavern room,” with a bar and drinking booths, as well as separate, smaller chambers on the same floor, above, or below.<sup>16</sup> These smaller chambers were often named, as in *1 Henry IV*, when Hal refers to a room called the “Half-moon,” and the drawer, Francis, orders Ralph to “Look down into the Pomegranate”

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14. One of the most important and influential refutations of this long-standing claim, that Caroline drama is nothing but escapist fluff, is Martin Butler’s *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–42* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

15. William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV Part I*, Arden Shakespeare, ed. David S. Kastan (Arden Shakespeare, 2004), 2.4.36, 43, 51, 55, 63, 84. Subsequent citations are to this edition.

16. See Peter Clark’s description of London taverns in *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200–1830* (New York: Longman, 1983), 11–19, 41–44. According to the *OED*, s.v. “bar, n. 28.a,” the earliest given usage of “bar” in this sense is 1592: “A barrier or counter, over which drink (or food) is served out to customers, in an inn, hotel, or tavern, and hence, in a coffee-house, at a railway-station, etc.” The Drawer in Brome’s *Weeding of Covent Garden* (London, 1658) tells a group of gallants who have gathered upstairs in a private room that “there’s so much reckon’d at the bar, and you please you may see it”; to which one of the gallants replies, “Nay, an’t be at the bar, it stands for Law,” in *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brome*, vol. 2 (London: John Pearson, 1873), 3.1, p. 46.

(2.4.26, 36). Mistress Quickly's insistence in 2 *Henry IV* that Falstaff "didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my Dolphin chamber" "to marry me, and make me my lady thy wife" locates this unstaged moment of intimacy in a similar space.<sup>17</sup> While it is possible, even likely, that a number of earlier tavern scenes (including those of 1 and 2 *Henry IV*) are meant to be set in such rooms, in later plays, such staging is often made explicit.<sup>18</sup> Thomas Dekker and John Webster's *Westward Ho!* (first performed 1604) features a scene set in a Rhenish wine house, where a group of citizens' wives have gathered with the gallants who have been pursuing them. When one of the men, who is actually a citizen in disguise (as a "wryting Schoolemaster" and secret panderer), cries out, "Peepers: Intelligencers: Euesdroppers" and warns, "your husbands" are "inquiring for you" with the Drawer, they call to him to "Keepe the doore lockt." But it all turns out to be a joke. "Come: drinke vp," the disguised husband, Justiniano, urges, "Theres Nobody."<sup>19</sup> The privacy this locked chamber affords seems to be almost an extension of what taverns offer more generally. Sir Gosling, one of the gallants in pursuit, later suggests they all meet again "At some Tauerne neare the water-side, thats priuate" in the morning, to which the still-disguised Justiniano replies, "The Greyhound, the Greyhound in Black-fryers, an excellent *Randeuous*" (2.3.103–5).<sup>20</sup> In John Webster's *A Cure for a Cukcold* (first performed 1624–25), by contrast, private rooms are sought out as offering something distinct from the tavern as a

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17. William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, ed. A. R. Humphreys (London: Methuen and Co, 1966), 2.1.84–85, 90.

18. It is possible, in fact, that the entirety of 1 *Henry IV*'s first tavern scene is set in a private room. When Hal urges Poino to "come out of that fat room and lend me thy hand to laugh a little," he could be using "fat" to mean "full of stale air, stuffy" (*OED*), but he might also be commenting on the main room's size relative to the smaller one Hal is encouraging him to enter—a more intimate space (2.4.1–2).

19. *Westward Ho!*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 2.1.49; 2.3.43, 46–49, 58–59. Subsequent citations are to this edition.

20. In this, *Westward Ho!* is not unusual among Jacobean city comedies. Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* stages some of its action in what appears to be a private room at the Mitre tavern, though the phrase is never used: Sogliardo tells one of the drawers to "bring up supper" into what is presumably a separate, private chamber. See *Every Man Out of His Humour*, ed. Helen Ostovich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 5.3.199. Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West, Part 1* opens near a "publicke Taverne" in Plymouth, before shifting to what must be a private room within that tavern (though again, the phrase is not used) (264). "This is my roome," Spencer tells a handful of sailors who enter a bit later, "And if you beare you, as you seeme in shew, / Like Gentlemen, sit and be sociable" (269). Much of the play's second act takes place in a tavern as well, and while separate chambers (including one called "the Mermaid") are referenced, the bulk of the action takes place in the central space of the tavern, where Bess (now a proprietress) and her vintner, Clem, interact with a number of customers. Heywood, *The Faire Maid of the West: or, A Girl Worth Gold*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood* (London: John Pearson, 1874). This edition is not divided into acts or scenes; I have provided page numbers instead.

whole. The wealthy merchant Franckford enters a tavern and demands that the drawer “Show a private room” to him and his companions—to which the gallant Eustace adds, “As far as you can from noise, boy.”<sup>21</sup> Dasher, the aptly named vintner of Thomas Nabbes’s *Covent Garden* (first performed 1632 or 1633), who rushes about shouting orders and greeting his guests, tells a waiting country gentleman that he has “now made ready a roome to entertaine your worthy person.”<sup>22</sup> And in *The Weeding of Covent-Garden* (first performed 1632 or 1633), a drawer announces to Crosswill, a country gentleman, “I come to tell you, sir, that your table’s covered in a fairer Room, and more private.”<sup>23</sup> For Crosswill, who has been complaining about the tavern’s “variety of noises . . . all excellent ill sounds” since having walked through its doors, the announcement brings welcome relief: “Have us out of thy windmil here, I prithee, and thy *By and by’s*” (2.1, 35, emphasis added). In each of these plays, the shift from the main room to a private room is meant to mark a conspicuous removal of oneself from noise and, by association, from the crowd of people producing it, a space that is by implication *less* private and, presumably, more public.

Like the closet, which has played such a central role in histories of privacy, actual taverns’ private rooms would have enabled ostentatious performances of privacy-seeking—what Patricia Fumerton calls “public privacy” and Alan Stewart describes as “a very public gesture of withdrawal.”<sup>24</sup> But they would have done so in commercial settings, in ways necessarily different from what was possible in the great homes that figure centrally in Fumerton’s and Stewart’s analysis. I want to consider the onstage tavern’s private room not as a space that enables an alternative form of privacy per se, but as one that allows for an alternative form of publicity, both within the world of the play and beyond it, in the space of the theater

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21. *A Cure for a Cuckold*, in *The Works of John Webster*, vol. 2, ed. David Gunby, David Carnegie, and MacDonald P. Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.1.23–22.

22. *Covent Garden*, in *The Works of Thomas Nabbes*, ed. A. H. Bullen (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 4.4, p. 67. The edition is not lineated, so I have provided act, scene, and page numbers. All subsequent citations are to this edition.

23. *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brome*, vol. 2 (London: John Pearson, 1873), 2.1, 35. The edition is not lineated, so I have provided act, scene, and page numbers. All subsequent citations are to this edition.

24. Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics*, 69; Stewart, “The Early Modern Closet Discovered,” 81. On domestic privacy and the early modern household, see especially Orlin, *Locating Privacy*, which challenges the claim first made by W. G. Hoskins and amended by Mark Girouard and Philippe Ariès that the “early modern revolution in domestic architecture” in elite homes was driven by a “desire for privacy” and resulted in “higher levels of personal privacy” (Orlin 5). Instead, these changes would have “brought members of the early modern household into closer proximity” and “turned family rooms into showpiece spaces” (5). Hoskins, “The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570–1640,” *Past and Present* 4 (1953): 44–59; Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); Ariès, *Passions of the Renaissance*, vol. 3 of *A History of Private Life*, ed. Roger Chartier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).



itself.<sup>25</sup> If the closet is “a secret nonpublic transactive space between two men behind a locked door,” then the tavern’s private room is a nonprivate transactive space between various collectives—mainly of men, but by no means exclusively so—who identify themselves as a collective simply by virtue of having entered into that space.<sup>26</sup> Rather than using the tavern’s hubbub for cover, they are choosing deliberately to enter into a room that is quieter, sacrificing the possibility of privacy-in-public for a highly visible act of physical seclusion that broadcasts itself as such. In the theater, of course, there are practical reasons for such staging, but the choice nonetheless opens up new possibilities for thinking about how the tavern and theater are linked, both conceptually and materially, in the inculcation of early modern publics.

Consider, for example, the roving gang of roasters who carouse their way through Richard Brome’s *The Weeding of Covent Garden*. Much of the play’s action takes place in the Goat and the Paris, two actual, historical taverns found on opposite ends of Covent Garden, the fashionable new housing development then being built in London’s West End.<sup>27</sup> These taverns are visited by nearly every character in Brome’s play, but they serve as a kind of home base for the Brotherhood of the Blade and Baton, a fraternity of often violent, very-nearly-always-drunk roasters; and their sister-sorority of prostitutes, the Sisters of the Scaberd. One of the Goat’s private rooms, in fact, seems to be in almost permanent possession of the Brotherhood. Well before the tavern is actually represented onstage, Nicholas tells his friend Mihil (both of whom are members of the fraternity) to “Come to the Goat Capricorne” (2.1, 24). When Mihil does arrive at the Goat later, he urges Nicholas to get upstairs “to your own room” before his father sees him (2.1, 34). The earlier reference to the Capricorn, coupled with the phrase “your own room,” suggests that this private chamber has been held almost in reserve for the men. It is in rooms like the Capricorn that the Brotherhood’s collective identity is formed and displayed repeatedly, over a series of visits, to varied and varying audiences. The Brotherhood’s members use these rooms to train and abuse new recruits as well as to practice affectations of dress, behavior, and speech—all the while being seen being not-seen by other patrons. Clotpoll, a foolish country gull who has been recruited by the Brotherhood, is told that he must stop using oaths and instead “furnish the mouth with some affected Protestation” (3.1, 39). The leader of the group, Captain Driblow, then offers some suggestions (“As I am honest, it is

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25. I am using “publicity” here in the relatively simple sense of making something, or someone, public.

26. Stewart, “The Early Modern Closet Discovered,” 83.

27. My discussion of Covent Garden’s taverns is wholly dependent on Matthew Steggle’s *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 46–51.

so. I am no honest man if it be not. Ud take me, if I lie to you. Nev'rgo, nev'rstirre, I vow, and such like" [pp. 39–40]). As Clotpoll tries out some of these expressions and introduces new ones of his own, the men begin arguing over who has the right to speak which protestation under which circumstances:

CLOT. Nev'r-go, nev'r-stir, I vow. I'le have, I vow then.

ANT. I vow, but you shall not, that's mine.

CLOT. Cann't you lend it me now and then brother? I'le have, I swear then,  
and come as nigh swearing as I can.

NICK. I swear but you must not, that's mine you know.

CLOT. I protest then, I'le have I protest, that's a City-word, and best to cozen  
with. (p. 40)

What they are arguing over is the distribution of a limited linguistic resource, the proper use of which both enables members of the Brotherhood to recognize one another as such and signals their membership to others. It is, in other words, largely a social performance, a display of taste and cultural capital that, ironically, reveals the Brotherhood's—and especially Clotpoll's—lack of both.

Variously defined as a fraternity, a group, and even as a "gang," the Brotherhood is not just a collection of gallants united by taste or by their pretension to it, as in so many city comedies.<sup>28</sup> Rather, it is a formal collective, or private club, whose members enjoy certain rights and responsibilities. Clotpoll, the foolish country gull who is the Brotherhood's newest recruit, must swear to uphold a number of "Articles" (p. 36). For all their obvious silliness, these articles also demand a perilous disregard for civic authority. Clotpoll must promise "To be true and faithful unto the whole Fraternity of the Blade and the Battoon, and to every member thereof," and he must also swear "That at no time" will he "reveal or make discovery of the Brother, or a member of the Brotherhood, of his lodging, haunts, or by-walks, to any Creditor, Officer, Sutler, or such like dangerous or suspitious person" (p. 36). The members of the Brotherhood are, like the gallants in Thomas Dekker's *The Gull's Hornbook* (London, 1609), always in debt, living almost entirely on credit, and are therefore always at risk of being thrown into the Counter. Given the acts of raucous, casual violence in which the members of the Brotherhood routinely engage, however, demanding secrecy before an officer could entail shielding one another from a whole host of charges. What the Articles in fact formally demand is a total rejection of the law and its agents. Clotpoll is further

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28. Matthew Steggle uses the term in "Brome, Covent Garden, and 1641," *Renaissance Forum* 5 (2001).

instructed to swear that he will “be ever at deadly defiance with all such people, as Protections are directed to in Parliament, and that you watch all occasions to prevent or rescue Gentlemen from the gripes of the Law brissons” (p. 37). Once again, the point is to avoid, and help others to avoid, being arrested for debt, but what is actually being demanded is a promise to fight bailiffs and constables with violence (“deadly defiance”).<sup>29</sup>

While the Brotherhood’s rejection of authority is anarchically indiscriminate, it is imagined as coalescing in a space that was becoming increasingly associated with sedition, and even open rebellion, in the years before the Civil War. In July of 1633, the Privy Council received a complaint regarding the total number of London taverns (which, according to an old and never much minded 1553 statute, were not to exceed 40), and ordered that “the Lord Mayor and Aldermen should return a certificate of the number of taverns, and that the Justices of the Peace do the like in the suburbs, especially in Covent Garden, and this within a month.”<sup>30</sup> That August, Westminster’s Justices of the Peace ordered that all but two of Covent Garden’s taverns be closed. William Clifton, proprietor of the Goat, eventually obtained one of these two licenses, but only after the Goat (along with the Paris and an unknown number of other Covent Garden taverns) had had its wine stocks seized.<sup>31</sup> Situated within such a geographically and conceptually central town space, Covent Garden’s taverns must have seemed tempting targets for regulation and surveillance—not just by the king and his council, but also by Parliament, Westminster, and the adjoining city of London, all of which had overlapping and competing interests in the site.<sup>32</sup> By the end of the decade, a handful of taverns near the Goat and the Paris would even play a central role in a failed scheme to menace Parliament with troops: Sir John Suckling, one of Brome’s professional rivals and a Covent Garden resident, was arrested in 1641 after allegedly arranging a series of meetings with his Army Plot co-conspirators at “the Dog Tavern in Westminster” and “the Dolphin in Grayes Inne lane.”<sup>33</sup> The details of the plot

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29. The reference to Parliamentary “protections” invokes the practice “whereby members extended Parliamentary privilege to their servants,” essentially protecting them (as the MPs themselves were protected) from arrest. See Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics 1621–1629* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 127 and 127.

30. *Calendar of State Papers (CSP)*, vol. 6, 138, 145. The 1633 action against the taverns of Covent Garden resulted in two years’ worth of legal wrangling. See *CSP* 6, 383; *CSP* 7, 173, 198–199, 424.

31. See Steggle, *Richard Brome*, 48–49. See also Adam Zucker’s *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 102–43.

32. As Zucker puts it, Covent Garden was a place where “the interests of governmental authority clashed with those of a poorly regulated service industry” (*The Places of Wit*, 117).

33. From the “Examination of John Lanyon” in *A Declaration or Remonstrance of the state of the Kingdome, Agreed on by the Lords and Commons Assembled in Parliament the 19 of May, 1642* (London, 1642), F2r.

were published in a series of pamphlets, part of the “unprecedented proliferation” of “newsprint, polemic, propaganda, and petitioning” that Lake and Pincus pin to this moment.<sup>34</sup> The people who made use of the actual Covent Garden taverns that Brome’s play imaginatively represents were not just, as in Suckling’s case, the occasional subjects of such pamphlets, but also, and much more reliably, their consumers, active participants in the market driving their production.

While it is difficult to see the Brotherhood’s celebration of lawlessness as expressing anything like a political consciousness, then, the history of the spaces they occupy, and the political practices associated with them, have the potential to reinvest their riot with new meaning. It is precisely there that, in large part, the “feverish levels of public discussion characteristic of the 1640s and 1650s” were beginning to take shape.<sup>35</sup> In other words, what the play represents as comical and private, a laughably ineffectual and apolitical form of rebellion, seems in fact to have been a central node within a far more serious and systematic threat to the existing political order.<sup>36</sup> Brome and others may have hoped to emphasize the relative harmlessness of plays and playhouse crowds by anesthetizing, through ridicule and impotence, the political import of what was happening in stage taverns versus in actual West End establishments like the Dog and Dolphin (or, for that matter, the Goat and the Paris). That the occupants of the one were very likely to be found in the other, or even, in Suckling’s case, to be plotting rebellion and plays alike, underscores why such a claim would have seemed both strategically wise and, ultimately, unpersuasive.

And yet, the actual, historical associations of Covent Garden’s taverns with sedition and even with public-making and the development of a political economy—while certainly significant—are, I want to argue, in a sense beside the point. In *The Weeding of Covent Garden*, the scenes set in the Goat’s private rooms help to theorize a role for the theater in the production of particular communities that is made possible not just by the location of the playhouses in which these comedies were staged, or even by the makeup of its audience, but also and especially by the distinctiveness of Caroline theatrical culture, with its accumulated decades of theater history. The political efficacy of such scenes may lie less in their modeling of a public, or even in their intervention in contemporary political contests, than in their iterability—that is, in the network of theatrical references that in-

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34. Lake and Pincus, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 280.

35. *Ibid.*, 281.

36. *The Weeding of Covent Garden* is not unique in this approach. Thomas Nabbes’s *Covent Garden* plays for laughs a vintner’s fears of government surveillance when he sees a private-room patron scribbling down what he says in a “table-booke”; even though by 1633, when the play was first performed, actual “intelligencer[s]” and “informer[s]” surely would have been circulating through West End taverns in much the way Nabbes’s vintner fears.

form any one particular scene, at the exact moment of its original performance, and in the interpretive uses to which that network can be put.

## II. "YE COMMON-WEALTH'S MEN"

A number of Caroline plays feature scenes set in taverns' private rooms, but a subset of these are almost identical in structure. This section examines the use of that dramatic device in three plays, each by different authors: Brome's *The Weeding of Covent Garden*; Thomas Nabbes's *Covent Garden* (1633), and Henry Glapthorne's *Wit in a Constable* (1636). In each of these plays, a group of men who self-identify as a group—and who publicize their identity largely through their use of a tavern's private room—are interrupted in their talking and drinking by a Justice of the Peace who seeks to restore order, but whose authority the men resolutely reject. In *The Weeding of Covent Garden*, the Justice of the Peace is the tellingly named Cockbrain, who declares at the start of the play that he operates "*In Heavens name and the Kings, and for the good of the Common-wealth*" (1.1, 2, emphasis original). A direct descendent of Ben Jonson's Adam Overdoe, whom he calls his "Reverend Ancestor," Cockbrain is determined to weed the "new plantation" (which he later calls "this *hopeful garden*") of prostitutes and roasters ("naughty packs" and "blades") (1.1, 2, 9, 2). When next we see him, Cockbrain has disguised himself as an itinerant musician who has thrust his way into the Goat's Capricorn room to spy on its occupants. Things do not go well. After Cockbrain identifies himself as a musician with "the favour of the house," Nicholas (one of the gallants) responds, "To intrude into Gentlemens privacies? ha!" (3.1, 41). The disguised Justice is then made to suffer a series of humiliations for what the play seems to suggest, along with Nicholas, has been an unjust intrusion: he has a glass of wine thrown in his face and is repeatedly beaten by the brethren. (In a later scene, set in the Paris Tavern, he will have his face clawed by two Sisters of the Scaberd.)

For many critics, the play's ridicule of Cockbrain identifies *The Weeding of Covent Garden* as an example of "oppositional' drama," a comedy that critiques "the manner and consequences of Charles's personal government."<sup>37</sup> Certainly the play has much to say about local and national politics, but *The Weeding of Covent Garden* is at least as interested in an altogether different kind of collective. When Cockbrain enters the Goat's Capricorn room, before he speaks to the "parcel of . . . venomous weeds" that fill it, he first turns to address the men and women offstage in Brome's audience, delivering a lengthy aside in which he exhorts all of the playgoers to take his part (3.1, 41). "Look upon me ye Common-wealths men," he begins, "now, like a State-Surgeon, while I search and try / The ulcerous coare of foule enormite" (p. 41). What Cockbrain hopes his opening aside will do, enlist

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37. See Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, 151–57, at 156; on the play's critical reception, see Steggle, *Richard Brome*, 46.

the audience as his allies, the play assumes it will not, though it is easy to imagine his character provoking a range of responses in performance. Cockbrain's grisly metaphor of a surgeon probing a sore suggests his intrusion is violently aggressive but also potentially necessary. His earnest endeavor fails through what are essentially mistakes of interpretation, and yet he is not wholly wrong: Nicholas, who seduced and abandoned Crosswill's niece, very nearly forcing her into prostitution, is a gentleman whose "privacies" could do with some oversight. By addressing the audience as a group, however ("ye Common-wealths men"), Cockbrain's speech imagines them into association with one another, forming a collective that is set up all but in opposition to the national one Cockbrain declares himself sworn to protect. As the scene continues, Cockbrain announces he is determined to "suffer private affliction with a Romane resolution for the publike welfare" (3.1, 42). Later he asks in an aside, "Was ever good Patriot so rudely handled?" (p. 42). The anticipated response, if not the actual one, is laughter; antipathy to his "project" rather than support. The audience is assumed not to be in collusion with Cockbrain's patriotic project (or, for that matter, with that of the brethren), but with one another as playgoers—whatever their individual responses to the speech, the scene, or Cockbrain's character may be. The scene is set up to form an alternative theatrical common, all of whom are "in" on the joke Cockbrain does not know he is, even if some of them do not find it especially funny.

Thomas Nabbes's *Covent Garden*, which has been called a "hastily written response" to Brome's *The Weeding of Covent Garden*, is in many ways more critical of social and political disorder than is Brome's play.<sup>38</sup> It, too, features a scene in which a group of gallants are interrupted in their carousing by a Justice of the Peace. Unlike Cockbrain, who enters in disguise, the Justice in this play—the just-as-tellingly-named Sir Generous Worthy—appears as himself, addressing the men "i'th'person of authoritie, / Invited by your noise" (4.3, 65). Like Cockbrain's, Sir Generous's speech positions him as an agent of the "publike welfare," which is here presented as being in perfect harmony with the interests of the state ("But that put off," he says of the authority he has just invoked, "Out of my love to the generall good, / I doe advise you to be temperate") (4.3, 65). Rather than chastening its hearers, however, the Justice's speech inspires a rebuttal from Jerker, one of the gallants, which has the extraordinary effect of immediately persuading the Justice he is in the wrong:

Sir, we are Gentlemen; and by that priviledge,  
Though we submit to politique Government

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38. See Mimi Yiu, "Facing Places in Richard Brome's *The Weeding of Covent Garden*," *Early Theatre* 10 (2007): 149–58, 157 n. 1. As Zucker writes, "Nabbes seems decidedly more ambivalent about social multiplicity in the neighborhood and the diffusion of fashionable competencies that accompanies it" [than does Brome] (*The Places of Wit*, 109).

In publique things, may be our owne law-makers  
 In morall life. If we offend the law  
 The law may punish us; which onely strives  
 To take away excesse, not the necessity  
 Or use of what's indifferent, and is made  
 Or good or bad by'ts use. We doe not drinke  
 To a distemper, and from thence derive  
 Th'originall of mischiefes: nor is pleasure  
 Our law, but temperance. Creation made  
 Every thing good, if we abuse it not.  
 Then, good Sir, (though you find enormities  
 Amongst the rabble) be not so suspitious  
 Of our more carefull carriage, that are gentlemen.

(4.3. 65–66)

This impassioned defense of the rights of the gentry, in which “submi[ssion]” to “politique Government” is imagined as voluntary and also partial, draws a striking distinction between public and “morall life” in which the latter is to be protected from governmental interference. The gentry, at least, are to be free from the kind of moral policing “the rabble” experience. As in Brome’s play, the politics here are clear—perhaps clearer, since Jerker claims for himself and his companions a kind of collective legitimacy unimaginable for Brome’s Brotherhood of the Blade and the Baton. But the speech itself, in fact the entire *play*, which echoes Brome’s title, settings, and elements of its plot so closely, invites an intertheatrical reading that has the capacity to alter its meaning. Jerker’s insistence that the Justice “find *enormities* / Amongst the rabble” paints Sir Generous with the same brush as both Cockbrain and Overdo, interpolating him into that dramatic lineage almost against the play’s, and it’s author’s, will. Sir Generous Worthy has, up until this point, hardly been a figure of ridicule, while Jerker has served primarily as a source of comic relief. In fact, even Jerker’s companions are taken aback by the tenor of his speech: “I did not think th’adst beene so good an Oratour,” the unfailingly well-mannered hero, Artlove, declares; to which Jerker replies, “Why, friend! because wanton familiaritie / Make’s us lesse serious when we are alone . . . ?” (4.3, 66). Despite the exclusionary thrust of Jerker’s speech, its theatrical references work inclusively, expansively, to pull in not just Nabbes’s audience but also a number of other audiences that those playgoers may have been, or could later become, part of, at Blackfriars (where *The Weeding of Covent Garden* was most likely first performed); at the Hope, where *Bartholomew Fair* was first staged; and at the Cockpit, where not only *Covent Garden* was performed, but where according to Matthew Steggle a 1641 revival of Brome’s *Weeding* may very well have been

staged as well; and so on.<sup>39</sup> While Jerker's public imaginary is clearly an exclusive and limited one, then, the network of dramatic references his speech engages is anything but. It is not just that these scenes model ways of thinking collectively, or even, in Nabbes's play, of asserting rights conditioned upon membership within such a collective. It is that their echoic, intertheatrical references help to produce the kind of theatergoing common imagined into being by Justice Cockbrain.

A final use of this device helps to put the others in perspective. Henry Glapthorne's *Wit in a Constable* (London, 1640), another Cockpit play, is set not in Covent Garden, but in various sites within the city of London—although it includes a number of references to important West End sites, such as the Strand, and its final scene takes place at a private home in Whitefriars. At the start of the play, Clare and Grace, the niece and daughter of Alderman Covet, are being pursued by a pair of clever gallants and by two less desirable suitors who nonetheless have Covet's blessing: Jeremy Holdfast, an empty-headed Cambridge "scholar," and Sir Timothy Shallowit, a foolish "Country Knight."<sup>40</sup> Though the astonishingly witty, sharp-tongued Clare and Grace desire the gallants, they decide to marry Holdfast and Shallowit instead—largely out of spite for tricks their lovers have played, but also because they believe these fools will be easier to master. The constable Busie overhears their plot, however, and vows to set everything right, so "that Constables / Hereafter may be thought to have some wit" (4.1, 222). The climax of the play occurs in Saint John's Head, a tavern near Ludgate, where Busie and several members of his watch have gathered in a private room. There, the men do more or less exactly what the gallants in the Covent Garden plays do: they drink, complain about unwanted intrusions from musicians ("doe you peepe?"), and celebrate and forge their collective identity—not as members of a leisured class, but as city watchmen (5.1, 232). Like the Brotherhood, or like Jerker and his friends, the watchmen and their constable use their tavern room to instruct one another in the manners and customs particular to their community, and to practice their performance. "I feele / My selfe already growing from a watchman / Into a head-borrow," one of the watchman declares, to which Busie responds, "thou shalt be / A Constable within this halfe houre. . . / Carry thy staffe with the red Crosse and Dagger / In as much state, as the best goldsmith, / That ere bore office in Cheap-side" (5.1, 231). There is a similar sense, moreover, of their possession of this space, one that looks and sounds an awful lot like such moments in the Covent Garden plays: "These squeakers," Busie complains of the fid-

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39. Steggle, "Brome, Covent Garden, and 1641."

40. *Wit in a Constable*, in *The Plays and Poems of Henry Glapthorne* (London: John Pearson, 1874), 167. Subsequent citations are to this edition.



dler who enters the room, “doe claime more / Priviledge in a Taverne, / Then a man in office; into every roome / They thrust their frised heads” (5.1, 231). The men’s socializing is interrupted by Alderman Covet, who serves in Glapthorne’s play a similar dramatic function to the Justices in Nabbes’s and Brome’s (and, since aldermen could and often did serve as Justices of the Peace in the city of London, the distinction between the two may be slight). As Covet bursts into the room, he is treated by its occupants not as a threat to be defused with ridicule, as Cockbrain is, or rebutted with a rousing expression of the rights of the gentry, like Sir Generous Worthy, but as a welcome guest. When the Drawer tells Busie “there’s one enquires for you, and I suppose him / To be at least an Alderman,” Busie says grandly, “And if he be / The Mayor and his horse, let them come up” (5.1, 234). He then invites Covet to join him in a cup of sack. As the Alderman blasts Busie’s “riot” and threatens to send him to the Counter, the constable remains calm, suggesting he borrow some money or pawn his “chaine” if he “want[s] coyne to pay” for drink (5.1, 234, 245). Finally, when Covet threatens him with whipping, Busie orders the watch to arrest Alderman Covet instead—and they do. “You may see sir, / My Watch-men know their duty, they’ll obey / None but the Constable” (5.1, 234).

If Brome’s *Brotherhood*, like the gallants of Nabbes’s *Covent Garden*, reject the Justice’s authority, so, too, do the Constable and his men, in what seems almost a direct parody of the sociopolitical contests displayed in the two *Covent Garden* plays. Busie, a city constable who is also a linen draper, is not of the same social standing as the gallants Valentine and Thorowgood (the two men Glapthorne sets up as idealized models of mannered masculinity); and while Alderman Covet, a gentleman, is, his association with both the city and civic authority disqualifies him for membership in the town culture that is here being celebrated. That community, as the Prologue makes clear, is made up of “Gentlemen” like Jerker from Nabbes’s *Covent Garden* or Nicholas and Mihil from Brome’s play, who may encounter constables regularly in the enjoyment of their own “riot[ous]” pleasures and who may also fear or envy aldermen like the one Busie so easily and so delightfully outwits. It is also made up of the men (and, to a lesser degree, the women) in Glapthorne’s audience. “And cause I know that you will obey / Authority,” the Prologue, delivered by Busie, archly begins,

I doe charge you, like the Play:  
 Thinke who I am, how often I may catch  
 You at ill houres in Tavernes, or i’t’h’ Watch;  
 In Fraies sometimes, nay sometimes (not to trench  
 Too much upon you) with a pretty wench. . . .  
 . . . Ile take no bribe  
 To let you passe: These sturdy knaves will take  
 Not the least mercy on you for my sake:

Nor will the Justice free you: (to your smart)  
 You'le find, he and his Clarke will take my part . . .  
 . . . for if the Play doe fall  
 Under your votes, Ile apprehend you all.

(p. 165)

As the Prologue makes clear, playgoers are taverngoers, and taverngoers are playgoers. All of them, or rather all of “you,” are being addressed as likely targets of the law’s more overzealous agents, men like Cockbrain, Sir Generous Worthy, Alderman Covet, and (in a different sense) Constable Busie, who seek to police gentlemen’s pleasures. The Prologue interpolates the offstage audience into the theatrical space of the tavern’s private room, and in doing so, it collapses the differences between three distinct spaces in Caroline London: actual taverns, such as those the men and women in the audience may frequent; imaginative representations of those taverns onstage, such as the one they are about to witness in Glapthorne’s play (but which they may also very likely have encountered in other plays, performed in this and in other theaters); and, finally, the physical and social space occupied by the playgoers themselves.

This association between playgoing and taverngoing is made again and again. When a fiddler enters Busie’s tavern room uninvited, offering to perform a “very new song,” the Constable rejects him because he expects it to be a “stale” story that “has beene already in two playes” (5.1, 232). *Covent Garden’s* Littleword is said to be scribbling down everything he hears in a tavern’s private room because “Hee is taking a humour for a Play” (4.5, 71). Such associations have a long history. Both moments recall Cripple’s assertion, in Thomas Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (1607), that he “could make enquiry / Where the best-witted gallants use to dine” and then

Follow them to the taverne, and there sit  
 In the next roome . . .  
 And over-heare their talke, observe their humours,  
 Collect their jeasts, put them into a play,  
 And tire them too with payment to behold  
 What I have filcht from them.<sup>41</sup>

It is not just that the same people are likely to frequent the two places, or even that each may provide or steal material from the other’s creative productions. Often

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41. *The Fair Made of the Exchange*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood*, vol. 2 (London: John Pearson, 1874), 47.

the joke rests at least partly on the fact that playhouses and taverns' private rooms are materially linked through the practice of "Short-writing," as Crosswill calls it, as well as through the circulation of phrases, compliments, songs, jokes, and other bits of wit that short-writing is meant to facilitate.<sup>42</sup> Ballads, songs, and speech tags flow in both directions, from playhouse to tavern and back again, but the effect of this joke's repetition is to collapse the one space into the other almost etilogically. It is as though the audience is watching the original moment of each play's composition—a dizzyingly kaleidoscopic overlaying of the spaces themselves and of the practices that take place within them that knits the two more tightly together.

The three Caroline comedies touched on here do this sort of work while simultaneously addressing their audiences *as* an audience—that is, as a collective of individuals who are united, however temporarily, by the shared fact of their playgoing, as opposed to more or less anything else. This is an important point. The intertheatrical way in which these plays function makes it possible even for people who have never been to a tavern, or who either would not or could not identify as taverngoers, to recall moments spent in such a setting. Such a group would include women, especially, but it might also include those who could afford admission to the Cockpit, say, but not the cost of the abundant food and drink whose consumption taverns' private rooms were meant to facilitate.<sup>43</sup> The reflexive theatricality of Glapthorne's Prologue underscores this point. "Thinke who I am," the Prologue demands, "how often I may catch / You at ill houres in Tavernes." Who he is, of course, is not just the Constable, but the actor playing the Constable in this particular play at the Cockpit theater; and in the latter sense, he may very well have "caught" some of the audience members at other stage taverns before. Indeed, Thomas Nabbes's 1638 *The Bride*—another Cockpit play that features, once again, the device of a Justice bursting into a tavern's private room—seems to make a joke out of just such dramatic recollection. Just before Justice Ferret appears, one of the roarers, who has lost a tavern brawl, declares himself "degraded from a *Blade* to a *Batoone*" (E2v). The line telescopes two dramatically imagined taverns, each of which has been used to frame the same dramatic device of the interrupting Justice, and each of which was performed at a different playhouse (the Cockpit, Blackfriars) catering, quite likely, to similar and even overlapping audiences.

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42. Brome, *The Weeding of Covent Garden*, 5

43. Such moments offer an example of the theater as "populuxe entertainment," as Paul Yachnin defines the term: an understanding of the theater as a commercial institution "whose main business is marketing popular versions of elite cultural goods to public audiences." See Yachnin, "The Populuxe Theatre," in *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate*, ed. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 38–65, at 49.

I offer this analysis up not as a utopian model of a community of playgoers, a dramatic “commons,” but as yet another way of approaching Caroline plays’ politics differently from how they were for so long discussed—as either pro- or anti-Charles, or as explicitly disinterested in politics as an unfashionable, and ungentlemanly, concern—and, finally, as a way of understanding how theatrical public-making might work differently at various moments in early modern theater history.<sup>44</sup> These scenes help to produce politically actualized collectives offstage, and they do so by functioning intertheatrically, incorporating iterable moments that signify across a network of past and contemporary plays and then cultivating the production and active use of a catalog of such moments to interpret the meaning of the scenes themselves. In this sense, the particular political investments of any given scene or play may matter less than the habitualizing work of theatergoing, with its incitements to recollect, interpret, and apply. This is, after all, the work that “you” (in Glapthorne’s terms) or the “common” (in Cockbrain’s) are imagined to be performing—work that helps to build a political consciousness rooted firmly in theatrical culture.

In a sense, this is nothing new. Playwrights had been quoting, paraphrasing, and responding to one another’s material since the commercial theaters first opened. But by the 1630s, the accumulated weight of these references all but eclipses the particularity of the references themselves. Recognizing this density and parsing it out, uncovering its various references, seems to have been part of the pleasure, the work, and the game of theatergoing, at least according to Richard Brome. In a poem celebrating the publication of William Cavendish’s “PLAY called THE VARIETY” that appears in Brome’s *Five New Plays* (London, 1659), immediately after the second Prologue for *Covent-Garden Weeded*, Brome claims that while he once considered himself a poet, he now finds “I am none.” If he were called “unto a Parliament / Of wit and judgement” to “certifie” all he “could say of your VARIETY,”

I would depose each Scene appear’d to me  
 An Act of wit, each Act a Comedy,  
 And all was such, to all that understood,  
 As knowing Johnson, swore By God, ’twas good.

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44. See Clifford Leech’s claim that “Masques and plays were for these people a way of escape from the unpleasantness of political circumstance and a means of cultivating the graces . . . the Caroline audience seems like a community of people waiting for its own dissolution, sipping its hemlock daintily.” Leech, *Shakespeare’s Tragedies and Other Studies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), 161. Butler’s *Theatre and Crisis*, cited above, was one of the first studies to challenge this approach by examining the plays’ political investments, particularly with regard to their Royalist or oppositional leanings. Recent studies on the formal, social, and political work of Caroline drama include Adam Zucker and Alan B. Farmer, eds., *Localizing Caroline Drama: Politics and Economics of the Early Modern Stage, 1625–42* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), and Zucker, *The Places of Wit*.

In other words, poetic achievement is a product of accumulation: the superior “wit” is the playwright of greatest density, whose every scene is an act, and whose every act an entire comedy. Appreciating such dramatic thickness requires “knowing” not only Jonson, but also Brome, Shakespeare, Heywood, Webster, and every other playwright whose works had, by 1649 (when *Variety* was first published), contributed to the dramatic variety embedded in William Cavendish’s apparently aptly named play. That this work had political import is suggested not just by Brome’s own juridical metaphors, but also, of course, by history itself, which turns the same scrutiny to the theaters in 1642 that it had earlier aimed at Covent Garden’s taverns.<sup>45</sup> Caroline dramatists did not just turn to taverns to think through the relationship between public and private space, or even to consider the political contests then taking shape in such culturally significant sites as Covent Garden—although their plays very often do both. They also used these spaces to think about the political function of theatergoing itself. The tavern scenes discussed above underscore some of the ways in which publics formed and publicized themselves as such in early modern London through and apart from the physical spaces they occupied. They also, through their very repetition, would have helped to produce similar collectives offstage—not just by modeling how publics were developing in sites so proximate, both culturally and topographically, to many of the playhouses themselves, but also by referencing, punning upon, and even at times directly quoting one another. These plays call on audiences to accumulate and repeatedly access a whole storehouse of references that function like a shared vocabulary for interpretive application. This is actualizing work, political work, in that it calls into being a community that recognizes itself as such and ascribes value to its critical acumen—of being one of the “all that understood”—someone who could recognize and parse the dense tissue of references available to the playwrights, actors, and audiences of mid-seventeenth-century London.

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45. The plays themselves often pick up on the shared surveillance of these sites. In *Covent Garden*, the tavern’s vintner panics when he sees a private-room patron scribbling in his “table-booke,” as he fears he is an “intelligencer” or “informer” taking his innocent expressions out of context (for example: “If I were a King I would be your servant”) (4.5, 70, 71, 72).