Scripts and/versus Playhouses: Ideological Production and the Renaissance Public Stage

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In the "Documents of Control" section of *The Elizabethan Stage,* E. K. Chambers records a 1574 Act of the Common Council of London which represents an attempt to restrain and regulate public playing within the Liberties. The reasons cited for such restraint are numerous and familiar: the gathering together of playgoers in inns and yards spreads the plague; it creates opportunities for illicit sexual encounters; and it provides the occasion for the dissemination, from the stage, of "unchaste, uncomelye, and unshamefaste speeches and doynges" (273–74). The document is long, and it contains little that would surprise anyone familiar with Renaissance polemic against the public stage or with the numerous petitions sent by the City to the queen and her council urging the restraint of playing during the next thirty years. What particularly interested me, however, was the way the document concludes, which is thus:

> . . . this Act (otherwise than towchinge the publishinge of unchaste, sedycious, and unmete matters:) shall not extend to anie plaies, Enterludes, Comodies, Tragidies, or shewes to be played or shewed in the pryvate hous, dwellinge, or

lodginge of anie nobleman, Citizen, or gentleman, which shall or will then have the same thear so played or shewed in his presence for the festyvitie of anie marriage, Assemblye of ffrendes, or otherlyke cawse withowte publique or Commen Collection of money of the Auditorie or behoulders theareof, reservinge alwaie to the Lorde Maior and Aldermen for the tyme beinge the Judgement and construction Accordinge to equitie what shalbe Counted suche a playenge or shewing in a pryvate place, anie things in this Acte to the Contrarie notwithstanding. (276)

What is striking to me here is the absolutely clear demarcation between the dangers of public playing, involving the "Commen Collection of money of the Auditorie," and the acceptability of playing within a "pryvate hous, dwellinge, or lodginge" where presumably no money was collected and where the audience had therefore not been transformed by a commercial transaction from guests to customers. As was to be true in a number of antitheatrical tracts and petitions from the City, what is specified here as objectionable about certain kinds of theatrical activity is less the matter or content of plays *per se,* and more the practices surrounding public playing: specifically, the removal of the scene of playing from the controlled space of the nobleman's house to a public venue; the dailiness of public playing versus its occasional use, for example, as part of a wedding festivity; the transformation of those who attend the play from guests or clients of a great man or wealthy citizen to paying customers; and, implicitly, the transformation of dramatists from straightforward servants of the nobility to something more akin to artisan entrepreneurs. In short, in this document public playing is presented as altering social relations by the emergent material practices attendant upon play production and attendance, quite apart from any consideration of the ideological import of the fictions enacted on the stage.

Another document written a few years later, when amphitheater playhouses were an established fact, underscores a similar point. In *The Schoole of Abuse,* 1579, Stephen Gosson, drawing on Ovid and classical attacks on the theater, rehearses a number of objections to the public theater that were to become standard tropes of English antitheatrical polemic: theater teaches immorality; it allures the senses rather than improves the mind; it encourages flouting of the sumptuary laws; it serves as a meeting place for whores and their customers. While Gosson certainly raises objections to the *content* of plays, he too is keenly alert to

the disruptive potential embedded in the very activity of going to a play. It provides occasion, for example, for the conspicuous display of ornate attire and for the promiscuous mixing together of social groups. The money that allowed an upstart crow to ape the clothes of his betters and to display them at the theater also allowed him to purchase a seat in the galleries. While the public theaters were hierarchically designed to reflect older status categories (common men in the pit; gentlemen in the galleries; lords on the very top), in actuality one's place at the public theater was determined less by one's rank than by one's ability or willingness to pay for choice or less choice places. Money thus stratified the audience in ways at least potentially at odds with older modes of stratification, a fact with which Ben Jonson was still ruefully coming to terms several decades later when in the preface to *Bartholomew Fair* he satirically enjoins various members of the audience at the Hope Theatre to offer criticism of his play strictly in proportion to the amount of money they had laid out at the theater door.

> It is further agreed that every person here have his or their free-will of censure, to like or dislike at their own charge, the author having now departed with his right: it shall be lawful for any man to judge his six pen'orth, his twelve pen'orth, so to his eighteen pence, two shillings, half a crown, to the value of his place; provided alway his place get not above his wit. And if he pay for half a dozen, he may censure for all them too, so that he will undertake that they shall be silent. He shall put in for censures here as they do for lots at the lottery; marry, if he drop but sixpence at the door, and will censure a crown's worth, it is thought there is no conscience or justice in that. (Induction, 76–86).

At court, as Jonson's epilogue to the same play suggests, Jonson can count on a spectator, the king, whose judgments are absolute and whose position is fixed, unaffected by the fluidity of market relations. In the public theater things are different. Much to Jonson's dismay, his art has become rather too much like a Bartholomew Fair commodity liable to judgment by those who can and will pay to see it, whatever their rank, education, and taste.

I wish to suggest that in such a context the ideological consequences of playgoing might be quite different for different social groups. Gosson indirectly broaches this issue in what is for me the most interesting part of his tract, namely, the concluding epistle, which is addressed to "the

gentlewomen citizens of London," a category of playgoer apparently significant enough to warrant Gosson's specific attention.[1] From Andrew Gurr's important study, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London,* we now know that women were in the public theater in significant numbers and that the women who attended the theater were neither simply courtesans nor aristocratic ladies; many seem to have been citizens' wives, part of that emergent group, "the middling sort," whom Gosson most explicitly addresses (Gurr, esp. 56–60). The presence of such women at the theater clearly worries Gosson, and he voices his worries in a typically paternalistic form: i.e., as a concern for woman's safety and good reputation. What Gosson argues is that the safest place for woman to be is at home, busy with household management, with neighborhood gossips, and, for recreation, with books. As he says, "The best councel I can give you, is to keepe home, and shun all occasion of ill speech" (F4). The dangerous place for woman to be is the theater. The interesting question is why.

Ostensibly, the threat is to woman's sexual purity. In the body of his tract Gosson argues that the theater is a place for sexual assignations; it is a "market of bawdrie" (C2). Various wantons and paramours, knaves and queens "Cheapen the merchandise in that place, which they pay for elsewhere as they can agree" (C2). Presumably, any woman—and not just a prostitute—could fall prey to passion if inflamed by the allegedly lewd behavior of the actors or by the amorous addresses of her male companions at the theater. Yet in his concluding epistle, Gosson dwells less on the possibility that the gentlewoman citizen may go off to sleep with a fellow playgoer and more on the danger posed to her by being gazed at by many men in the public space of the theater. As Gosson says,

> Thought is free; you can forbidd no man, that vieweth you, to noute you and that noateth you, to judge you, for entring to places of suspition. (F2)

The threat is not so much to woman's bodily purity, as to her reputation. In Gosson's account the female playgoer is symbolically whored by the gaze of many men, each woman a potential Cressida in the camp of the Greeks, vulnerable, alone, and open to whatever imputations men might cast upon her. She becomes what we might call the object of promiscuous gazing. Gosson presents the situation entirely paternalistically. For the "good" of women he warns them to stay at home, to shut themselves

away from all dangers, and to find pleasure in reading or in the gossip of other women.

Yet who is endangered, really, by women's theatergoing? The intensity of Gosson's scrutiny of the woman playgoer indicates to me that her presence in the theater may have been felt to threaten more than her own purity, that in some way it put her "into circulation" in the public world of Elizabethan England in ways threatening to the larger patriarchal economy within which her circulation was in theory a highly structured process involving her passage from the house and surveillance of the father to the house and surveillance of the husband. This process was more complicated and class specific than I am indicating here, and it is also true that men, at least in the elite classes, often had their marriage choices determined by the father and were in no absolute sense free agents. But it was as the privileged sex that men circulated through the structures of Elizabethan society, and it was they to whom women were by and large accountable, and not vice versa. The threat the theater seems to hold for Gosson in regard to ordinary gentlewomen is that in that public space such women have become unanchored from the structures of surveillance and control "normal" to the culture and useful in securing the boundary between "good women" and "whores." Not literally passed, like Cressida, from hand to hand, lip to lip, the female spectator passes instead from eye to eye, her value as the exclusive possession of one man cheapened, put at risk, by the gazing of many eyes. To whom, in such a context, does woman belong? Are her meaning and value fixed, or fluctuating? How does one classify a woman who is not literally a whore and yet who is not, as good women were supposed to be, at home? To handle the ambiguity, the potential blurring of ideological categories, Gosson would send the gentlewoman citizen out of the theater and back to her house, husband, father, books, and gossips, where such questions admit of easier answers.

Yet I suspect the threat to the patriarchal order is even more complex than I have so far indicated. By drawing on the Cressida analogy, I have seemed to assent to Gosson's most fundamental premise, namely, that women in the theater were simply objects of scrutiny and desire, and that in that position they were in danger of being read as whores or otherwise becoming commodities outside the control of one man. But what if one reads the situation less within the horizons of masculinist

ideology and asks whether women might have been empowered, and not simply victimized, by their novel position within the theater? In the theatrical economy of gazes, could men have done all the looking, held all the power? Joel Steinberg could not bear the thought that Hedda Nussbaum was looking at him, and he beat her eyes until artificial tear-ducts had to be inserted in one of them. Is it possible that in the theater women were licensed to look—and in a larger sense to judge what they saw and to exercise autonomy—in ways that problematized women's status as object within patriarchy? I have no definitive answer to my own question yet, but what I tentatively suggest is that Gosson's prescriptive rhetoric may be a response, not to a fear *for* woman, but *of* woman, as she takes up a place in an institution which, as Steven Mullaney has argued, existed at least symbolically on the margins of authorized culture, opening space for the transformation, as much as the simple reproduction, of that culture (*The Place of the Stage* 26–59). At the theater door, money changed hands in a way which enabled women access to the pleasure and privilege of gazing, certainly at the stage, and probably at the audience as well. They were therefore, as Jonson ruefully acknowledges, among those authorized to exercise their sixpence worth, or their penny's worth, of judgment. Whether or not they were accompanied by husbands or fathers, women at the theater were not "at home," but in public, where they could become objects of desire, certainly, but also desiring subjects, stimulated to want what was on display at the theater, which must have been, not just sexual opportunity, but all the trappings of a commodifying culture worn upon the very backs of those attending the theater and making it increasingly difficult to discern "who one really was" in terms of the categories of a status system based on fixed and unchanging social hierarchies. As Jean-Christophe Agnew has argued, the Renaissance stage made the liquidity of social relations in a commercializing culture its theme (111–14). I would simply argue that the practice of playgoing may have embodied that liquidity, not simply thematized it. For Gosson good wives who took up a place at the public theater were dangerously out of their true and appropriate place, and he clearly meant to return them to that proper place by threatening those who remained in the place of danger with the name of whore. The question is, when is a person out of her place *in* danger and when is she *a* danger to those whom, by her new placement, she is displacing?

I am going to return to the question of women at the public theater and how their presence may have altered social relations in Elizabethan England, but I want to do so by way of two brief detours: one into the contemporary scene of ideological analyses of Renaissance drama, one into Thomas Heywood's little-studied play, *The Wise-woman of Hogsdon,* a work which invites thematization of the question of woman as spectacle and spectator, object and agent within a culture both patriarchal and theatrical, and which invites us to speculate about the potential gap, for certain groups, between the ideological implications of a given play and the ideological consequences of playgoing.

I am interested in the question of what it meant that women attended the Renaissance public theater in part because I, and a cohort of others from whom I am constantly learning, have for a while been considering the question of the ideological work done by Renaissance theater in Renaissance culture.[2] By ideological work, I mean simply how this institution and the plays put on there contributed to that larger ensemble of beliefs and practices comprising Elizabethan subjects' lived relations to the real. Ideology in my understanding is the obviousness of culture, what goes without saying, what is lived as true. It is therefore precisely not a set of beliefs known to be "false" but cynically sold to others to hold them in an inferior position, nor does it originate from a conspiratorial power group (or author) bent on dominating or deceiving others. This does not mean, however, that ideology does not function to produce unequal social relations within social formations stratified by race, gender, and class, simply that ideology does not lie in anyone's conscious control, nor can it be opposed to "truth," simply to other ideological modalities of knowing. Traces of Althusserian rhetoric appear in my prose because, despite all that must be rejected and modified in the Althusserian problematic, I still find his one of the most strenuous and fruitful theorizations of ideology we have, valuable enough to warrant modification, rather than outright rejection (see especially "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"). For Althusser the work of ideology in general is to reproduce the relations of production necessary to the survival and perpetuation of particular modes of production. It is the work of ideology to call people, interpellate them, into their positions as workers, managers, owners, rulers and ruled and to provide them with the subjectivities which hold them in these places with a minimum of force or

coercion. Ideology thus makes people willing subjects of the dominant order.

Clearly one of the major elements of Althusser's thought needing modification is his overly deterministic view of the operations of ideology. As many have noted, elegant and therefore powerful as is Althusser's account of the operations of ideology, it does not give adequate attention to explaining change, only cultural reproduction. And it is class reductionist.[3] The only important struggles for Althusser are class struggles. Anyone continuing to work with Althusser has to take account of these and other problems, partly by recognizing, with Göran Therborn, that interpellation is a process which not only subjects the subject but qualifies him or her for maneuver within the terrain of ideology (17–18); partly because no subject ever occupies only one subject position, but rather is entangled in a network of competing and contestatory ideologies. This is particularly true for complex societies in which change at different levels of the social formation occurs in a nonhomologous fashion. Contradictions among the multiple positionings of the subject can therefore lead to his or her politicization, to the abandonment of particular ideological positions, and to the creation of shifting horizons of resistance.[4]

Such ideas have become increasingly important in the ideological study of Renaissance drama in this country as the emphasis in the early moments of new historicism on the stage as the simple agent of state power has come under pressure.[5] Now it seems more adequate to speak of the stage, neither as a site simply for the dissemination of aristocratic and masculinist ideology, nor, in the mirror image of this position, as a site for a simple subversion of a social order statically and monolithically conceived as a homologous totality. Instead, a number of scholars are trying to understand how the stage could have functioned in a more complex and contradictory fashion within the interstices of a social formation which was not static, and in which the process of ideological domination is probably best understood as a process of constant negotiation with, rather than simple containment of, emergent or oppositional positions.

This new direction in the ideological study of Renaissance theater is not, I think, simply an attempt to impose a liberationist paradigm on the stage to displace or replace a paradigm of containment. It indicates in-

stead a recognition both of the possibilities for contradiction in the operations of the stage and the differential ways it could have impacted on various social groups. Richard Burt, for example, has stressed how the reception of productions in the public theater could not be controlled in the same way and to the same extent as productions in more explicitly courtly venues (343–45), a fact that seems acknowledged by the Act of the Common Council of London with which I began this paper, in which the council registered a fear that public playing removed the stabilizing contexts for reception provided by the nobleman's house or the official occasion of the wedding ceremony. Exploring similar issues, Steven Mullaney has recently suggested that the Renaissance stage, in an era when literacy was still not widespread, served to expand, for the urban populace of London, the parameters of the symbolic economy within which it moved; he further argues that such an expansion had potentially unsettling social consequences, simply because the circulation of representations had moved beyond the control of an elite ("The Work of Culture").

Central to much of this work is the implicit recognition that if one wishes to speak of the ideological consequences of the theater, one needs to attend to more than just theatrical representations *qua* representations, but also to the material practices and conventions of the stage and of theatergoing. As Althusser has stressed, the domain of the ideological involves more than just "ideas"; the materiality of ideology consists precisely in its embodiment in material practices (165–70). In terms of the Renaissance theater, an emphasis upon the materiality of ideology means that it is not sufficient to talk about representations of monarchy without talking about the consequences of having those representations daily enacted by men of low estate in public amphitheaters for commercial gain (Kastan, esp. 472–75); not sufficient to talk about the consequences of fables of cross-dressing without considering the fact that they were enacted by men in women's clothing;[6] not sufficient to talk about the interpellation of theatrical subjects by playscripts without talking about their interpellation by the material practices of playgoing in which all people, whatever their rank or gender, were transformed into the paying customers of the emerging mercantile economy. The simplest way to put the point I wish to make is that one can not assume that theatrical representations have an ideological significance which is fixed and un-

changing or which is unaffected by the conditions in which the representations are produced and consumed. It has sometimes been tempting to me to think that the material practices surrounding playgoing in urban London were destabilizing to aristocratic and masculinist hegemony while the dramatic scripts themselves mostly were not. This formulation, however, is too simple. It is necessary, I think, to see that the scripts themselves embody social struggle, that they enact a contest between and a negotiation among competing ideological positions; and that a further level of analysis is also necessary as one tries to take account of the potential consonance or conflict between the ideological import of a dramatic fable and of the material conditions of its production. As my title awkwardly states the problem: do we assume that scripts and playhouse practice ideologically reinforce one another, or that, at least potentially, they can be in conflict? That is, can they interpellate subjects in contradictory ways? Because Renaissance discourse about the theater focuses as much on the scene of playing as on what is performed at that scene, I believe the awkward duality with which I am wrestling is not my own invention, but a problem at some level recognized in the period itself.

Which leads me to *The Wise-woman of Hogsdon,* a play which I want to examine briefly with a particular group of spectators in mind, Gosson's gentlewoman citizens of London. I chose this play partly because it is not by Shakespeare, and so allows a freshness of address, and partly because it raises in interesting ways the question of what *were* the ideological consequences, for women, of theatergoing. The work is unusual in that it plays out both class and gender conflict around the issue of who will control the power to manipulate the world through theatrical means. The title character, the cunning woman, is a lower-class figure who makes her living by using her "special powers" to perform services for her neighbors, services such as finding a missing or lost object, diagnosing illness, telling the future. As Keith Thomas reports, such figures were not uncommon in English village life well into the seventeenth century. They not only performed vital physical services, such as helping women in childbirth, but they also filled a psychological gap left when the Reformation led to the abolition of certain practices, such as exorcism and confession, by which the Roman Church had allayed the common man or woman's guilt about sin and his or her fears of demonic possession

(Thomas 177–279, esp. 265). Cunning people, with their charms and medicines and prophetic powers, seemed in possession of powerful, if forbidden, knowledges, which made them anathema to the Church and to medical men, but not necessarily to ordinary people.

Often, in the polemical literature of the time, cunning people, along with witches, were presented as agents of Satan. Sometimes, as in Reginald Scot's treatise *The Discoverie of Witchcraft,* cunning women, conjurers, exorcists, witches, and other "jugglers" were simply presented as charlatans who gained their power by tricks, illusions, and the artful leading on of their clients. Heywood's play doesn't present the cunning woman as an agent of Satan, but she is presented as a first-class swindler and charlatan. For example, when her neighbors come to her for advice, she asks leading questions to get them to tell her the details of their troubles, which she then pretends to have known in advance.

WISEWOMAN

And who distill'd this water?

COUNTRYMAN

My wives Limbeck, if it please you.

WISEWOMAN

And where doth the paine hold her most?

COUNTRYMAN

Marry at her heart forsooth.

WISEWOMAN

Ey, at her heart, shee hath a griping at her heart.

COUNTRYMAN

You have hit it right.

WISEWOMAN

Nay, I can see so much in the Urine.

LUCE 2

Just so much as is told her.

WISEWOMAN

Shee hath no paine in her head, hath shee?

COUNTRYMAN

No indeed, I never heard her complaine of her head,

WISEWOMAN

I told you so, her paine lyes all at her heart;
Alas good heart! but how feeles shee her stomacke?

COUNTRYMAN

O queasie, and sicke at stomacke.

WISEWOMAN
Ey, I warrant you, I think I can see as farre into a Mill-stone as another.
(Heywood 292; 2.1.7–21)

Alternatively, she conceals herself in a closet by her front door, listening while her servant asks a client her business and then pretends to have divined that business. Essentially unlettered, she drops Latin tags and pretends to read in deep books of magical lore.

She is, then, a charlatan, and also something of a bawd. Her house is where women come to have their illegitimate babies, which the wise woman then disposes of by leaving them on the doorsteps of the wealthy. And the walls of this house contain the pictures of young women with whom a man can spend the night. Hardly the patron of the chaste, silent, and obedient, this lower-class woman traffics in flesh. This makes her house a transgressive space where deceptive and illicit activities are carried on, and which seems to put Heywood's play, ideologically, on the side of Reginald Scot and his debunking demystification of such charlatans.

Yet the class and gender politics of this play are more complicated than I've indicated. For all that the wise woman is a charlatan and her house a house of assignations, it is also the place where all members of the community come, the virtuous and the less than virtuous, and it is the place where the community's problems get solved, thanks largely to the theatrical skills of the wise woman herself. Her house becomes the site where the community's sexual and social economy is regulated, where, in essence, the predatory theatricality of Chartley, the young gallant who is the play's male protagonist, is defeated by the cleverness of a group of women.

The plot, despite some Byzantine overtones, is a simple one. Chartley was once contracted to marry a woman, Luce 2, whom he abandoned practically on her marriage night. This woman, disguised as a man, tracks Chartley down and schemes to win him back by contracting herself as a servant to the wise woman and joining with the wise woman in manipulating this rogue. He, after leaving Luce 2, contracts himself to a second woman, Luce 1, virtuous daughter of a London goldsmith, whom he also abandons as he goes off in pursuit of yet a third woman, Gratiana, daughter of a wealthy knight. Chartley acts out what is presented as a

dangerous instability in aristocratic male desire. He moves from woman to woman, lying to each, and ends up staging an elaborate fiction by which, on the night before his marriage to Gratiana, the knight's daughter, he goes off to sleep with Luce 1 at the wise woman's house, pretending he has been urgently called away by a dying father.

What keeps his predatory desire from ruining the lives of all these prospective brides is the cunning woman, who is presented as his antagonist from the first time they meet. These two knaves are presented as natural enemies. He calls her every sort of name—blackness, witch, hag, she-devil, sorceress, Lady Proserpine, Madam Hecate—and tries to beat her; she, in turn, vows to do anything to frustrate his desires. Twice, using highly theatrical ruses, she deceives him. The first time, when he comes to her house to marry Luce 1, she puts everyone in disguise and fools him into marrying Luce 2 and Luce 1 into marrying an earnest young suitor named Boyster, thus joining Chartley to the first object of his desire and the goldsmith's daughter to a suitably sober mate. When, still deceived into believing he has wed Luce 1, he comes to sleep with her at the wise woman's house, the women stage a trick which exposes his chicanery to all those—his father, Gratiana's father, Luce 1 and Luce 2—whom he has attempted to deceive. When he appears at her house, the wise woman puts him in a room surrounded by a circle of adjoining rooms from which he is observed by all his gulls, who one by one come forward to confront him. He is left a sputtering mass of jelly, the libertine plots and deceptions of the aristocratic male exposed to everyone's gaze.

The house of the wise woman thus becomes a world upside down where women temporarily have control of men, the lower classes of the upper. Only the stigmatized lower-class figure, the cunning woman, seems to have the power to right the social world threatened by gentlemanly profligacy and theatricality. Fire drives out fire. Yet the roles of the two Luces deserve further attention. Significantly, Luce 1, while somewhat inexplicably the wise woman's friend, is kept in ignorance by her throughout the play. Luce 1 has all the respectability the wise woman lacks and none of her power. She is chaste, fairly silent, and obedient. An early scene finds her lamenting to an apprentice the fact she must sit in public to mind her father's shop, a position which exposes her to the gaze of many men, a position she abhors.

> I doe not love to sit thus publikely:
> And yet upon the traffique of our Wares,
> Our provident Eyes and presence must still wayte.
> Doe you attend the shop, Ile ply my worke.
> I see my father is not jelous of me,
> That trusts mee to the open view of all.
> The reason is, hee knowes my thoughts are chast,
> And my care such, as that it needes the awe
> Of no strict Overseer.
>
> (Heywood 285; 1.2.4–12)

This good daughter of the patriarchy speaks at once to every suitor of marriage; and her marriage choice, Chartley, is directly referred by her to her father to ask his permission. Unlike the stereotyping of the merchant class in much city comedy, Luce and her father are not rich. They are, simply, virtuous citizens devoid of guile. Importantly, they are also powerless in the face both of Chartley's manipulations and the wise woman's. Significantly, Luce 1 does not even know that because of the disguises worn at her wedding she has not married Chartley, but Boyster, the mate she finds herself wedded to at play's end. That compliance with dominant codes of feminine virtue results in powerlessness and domination is strikingly revealed by the presence in the play of Luce 1's double, the aggressively different Luce 2. Of this woman we know little but that she is a "gentlewoman," left her father's house when abandoned by Chartley, and is absolutely tenacious in her pursuit of this feckless gallant. For most of the play, she dresses as a male page—a theatrical disguise she uses to achieve power over Chartley. In fact, she wears women's clothing only when participating in the plot to trick him into marrying her instead of Luce 1. The power she symbolically assumes by adopting male dress is further indicated by the fact that she is the instigator of much of the plotting that goes on at the wise woman's. She and the cunning woman are the primary architects of the two great scenes of theatrical cozenage: the double wedding where the Jacks get only the Jills Luce 2 and the wise woman have assigned to them, and the climactic scene in which, before one audience after another, Chartley has his lying ways exposed. As is so often true in this period, power is shown to lie with the theatrically skillful. If the wise woman outsmarts and outdeceives Chartley, lower-class feminine theatricality outstripping his en-

trepreneurial shapeshifting, the wise woman is in turn outsmarted by the chaste, if hardly silent and compliant, Luce 2, who does not reveal her female sex to the wise woman until the last deception has been played out and Luce 2 claims Chartley for her own, her desire gratified as Luce 1's was not. In the hierarchy of power and knowledge which emerges in the play, Luce 2 is at the very top, and she is the transgressive figure of the woman in man's attire seemingly free from the control of a father or husband.

Of course, it is easy to see a reining in of the subversive impulses of the play in its denouement. This is particularly true concerning Luce 2, who, having spent much of the play in breeches and free of overt patriarchal control, at play's end willingly enters what will in all likelihood be a patriarchal marriage and doffs her breeches and with them, perhaps, her power. Moveover, her being a gentlewoman affirms class privilege even as she subverts gender hierarchy. It is, after all, the gentlewoman whose desire is gratified, and not the desire of the goldsmith's daughter. Moveover, the play ends up affirming patriarchal marriage three times over, and rather than class antagonism, concludes with a utopian image of class reconciliation as Chartley blesses his enemy the wise woman, and the union of Luce 1 and Boyster marks the non-predatory alliance of citizen and gentleman classes.

Despite these obviously recuperative elements, the play reveals the constructed and interested nature of the social order by showing subordinated groups successfully occupying the positions and clothing and wielding the powers of the dominators, including their use of theatrical practices to control the world. While it is difficult to construe the play as advocating the dismantling of either the patriarchal system or the class system, in several ways it invites disidentification with both. This is not only because it shows men, and gentlemen, as no more inherently and naturally capable of wielding power than women and lower-class figures, thus undermining the "natural" justification for their privileges, but the play also is traversed by competing understandings of the same phenomena which show the implicit contest between ideological positions. For example, while the wise woman is inscribed within a discourse of the charlatan—even by Luce 2—she is also clearly inscribed within a discourse of Rabelaisian carnal materiality and associated with the homeostatic regulation of the social and sexual economy of the play. Likewise,

while Luce 1 is inscribed within the discourse of the good woman familiar from the conduct books, Luce 2 is her transgressive double, embodying an alternative to, and demystification of, her sister. The play is thus a site for ideological contestation and not merely for the reproduction of dominant ideologies. While it concludes with an image of harmony and utopian resolution of class and gender struggle, it has recorded traces of that struggle.

And what of the female spectator to this fiction? Her experience must have been complicated. Though invited by cultural discourses such as Gosson's to take herself off, like a good Luce 1, to her father's house, to flee the promiscuous gazing of men, and to wait for a husband to be delivered to her, the female playgoer nonetheless *was* in the theater, in this instance watching a fiction that to some extent validated women as desiring, active subjects. This play's climactic scene presents the highly entertaining spectacle of a man observed, manipulated, and humiliated by the women he has tried to wrong. And this male is ultimately made subject to the desire of the woman who has most aggressively and transgressively sought him. Moreover, that woman has attained her desire, chastely, within the house of a bawd, cooperating with, but distancing herself from, the wise woman, maneuvering between the powerlessness of Luce 1 and the victimization of those nameless women whose babies the cunning woman left on the doorsteps of the rich.

The female playgoer watching this fiction was herself, in Gosson's terms, within "the market of bawdrie," that is, within the commercial theater, a site, I would argue, every bit as complicated, for women, as the wise woman's house. In this place of licensed gazing, where men and women alike were both spectacles and spectators, desired and desiring, I doubt that only women's chastity or women's reputations were at risk, despite Gosson's polemic to that effect. Even when this theater, through its fictions, invited women to take up the subordinate positions masculine ideology defined as proper for them (and Heywood's play, as I have argued, is more transgressive in its gender ideology than such a description would warrant), the very practice of playgoing put women in positions potentially unsettling to patriarchal control. To be part of urban public life as spectator, consumer, and judge moved the gentlewoman citizen outside of that domestic enclosure to which Gosson would return her. While it does no good to exaggerate the powers of women in such

a situation, I think the antitheatrical polemicists were right to worry about female theatergoing, though not only for the reasons they were able to articulate. Reading Gosson, I wonder about the unsaid of his text. Focusing on the danger *to* women, did he also feel endangered *by* them? Did he at some level sense that the gentlewomen citizens' attendance at the theater was part of a process of cultural change which could help to unsettle the gender positions and definitions upon which masculine dominance rested? In short, was Gosson's unspoken fear that the practice of female theatergoing, the entry of the middle-class woman into the house of Proteus, would spur her transformation from the compliant and powerless object, Luce 1, into the transgressive, desiring subject whose name could only be Luce 2, identical, but, oh, so different?

Notes

1. S. P. Zitner in "Gosson, Ovid, and the Elizabethan Audience" explores the extent to which Gosson's account of the Elizabethan playgoing audience in the body of *The Schoole of Abuse* draws upon passages in Ovid's *Art of Love.* He concludes that Gosson's descriptions should not be taken as an unmediated eyewitness report of Elizabethan theatergoing. Gosson's debt to Ovid, as well as his polemical intentions, must be taken into account before one accepts his treatise as description of objective fact. In this essay I am more interested in the concluding epistle to the gentlewomen of London than in the body of the tract. More importantly, however, I assume that all of Gosson's tract is ideological and interested, rather than dispassionately objective. I am concerned with why Gosson and his fellow antitheatricalists circulated certain narratives (whatever their source) about women at the theater; and I wish to offer a counter-account of what the middle-class woman's presence in that cultural space may have signified in terms of changing social relations in early modern England.

2. The list of those engaged in this enterprise is a long one. In the bibliography I list representative work of those—feminists, new historicists, and Marxists—who have influenced me the most. These people include Catherine Belsey, Lynda Boose, Richard Burt, Walter Cohen, Jonathan Dollimore, Jonathan Goldberg, Stephen Greenblatt, Coppélia Kahn, David Kastan, Kathleen McLuskie, Steven Mullaney, Carol Neely, Karen Newman, Mary Beth Rose, Peter Stallybrass, and Leonard Tennenhouse.

3. For a useful summary of critiques and extensions of Althusser's work see Terry E. Boswell et al.

4. For the idea of disidentification see Pêcheux 158–63. For a discussion of the multiple positioning of subjects in complex societies, and of the multiple axes of social struggle, see Mouffe.

5. This critique has by now become a commonplace. It is an indication of changes within new historicism itself that in *Shakespearean Negotiations* Stephen Greenblatt writes that "the circulation of social energy by and through the stage was not part of a single coherent, totalizing system. Rather, it was partial, fragmentary, conflictual; elements were crossed, torn apart, recombined, set against each other; particular social practices were magnified by the stage, others diminished, exalted, evacuated" (19).

6. A number of scholars have dealt with this issue. For an overview of the debates see my essay "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England."

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