Abbreviations

CHD	Chadwyck-Healy database of English drama, http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/
DTRB	Ian Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)
EEBO	Early English Books Online, http://eebo.chadwyck.com/
EETS	Early English Text Society
ELH	*English Literary History*
ELR	*English Literary Renaissance*
EPT	Glynne Wickham, Herbert Berry and William Ingram, eds., *English Professional Theatre 1530–1660*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000
ES	E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923)
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition

Chapter 1

Places of performance

Performance spaces

Early theatrical performance in England was not linked either with professional companies or with purpose-built playhouses. Playing arose out of particular sets of circumstances in specific places at specific times: a group of travelling players arriving in town or calling at the great house of a local lord; a group of parishioners wishing to stage a play in order to raise money for a new roof for the church; a city wishing to honour a religious festival and attract visitors to the city; an enterprising individual staging versions of her neighbours' adulterous affairs in her back yard. This absence of any necessary tie to playhouses or professional companies means that it can be quite difficult to put a boundary around what should be classed as 'theatre'.

Performance in churches and churchyards, for example, widespread from medieval times into the early seventeenth century, constitutes a case in point. Scholars argue about whether we should properly seek to mark a boundary between church ritual and church drama and, if so, where it is to be drawn. The problem centres on our notion of performance. Few would argue that a church service is not 'performed' in some sense, but the terms 'theatre' and 'drama' seem to introduce a different dimension, and the former especially was historically used as a term of abuse by Reformers and Protestants attacking the ritual of the Catholic mass.[1] The fact is that the church was host to a whole spectrum of different kinds of performance, ranging from set speeches and responses, singing and the ritual acts of the mass, to slightly expanded and elaborated ritual enactments of liturgical material, sung Latin dramatisations of biblical material and secular, vernacular playing. This medley of practice, however, cannot be represented as an evolutionary development from 'church' drama to 'secular' drama. One reason why we now have such difficulty in making this distinction is that we are imposing it on a culture that did not operate within that kind of binary, but where the church was so inextricably entwined with both the state and everyday life that thinking through their separation would have been very difficult

1. Map of England, marking places of performance mentioned in the text.

for someone living in the period covered by this book, especially the early part.

A distinction between religious and secular performance is not one that the places of performance will support. Drama did not simply move, as scholars once argued, from inside to outside the church. Drama that we might consider

secular was sometimes performed inside churches, at least from the sixteenth century, if not before, just as drama that we would consider religious might be performed outside churches. It is arguable, as John Wasson says, 'that far more than half of all vernacular plays of the English Middle Ages and Renaissance were in fact performed in churches'.[2] And vernacular plays might include plays defined, by later standards, as either religious or secular in content, or both simultaneously. Precisely one of the problems encountered by later scholars seeking to divide performance into these two categories is that in practice they constantly overlap: a 'religious' play like the Towneley *Second Shepherds' Play* deliberately sets a farce in which a stolen sheep is swaddled and laid in a cradle alongside a dramatisation of the birth of the Lamb of God, while 'secular' plays like John Bale's *King John* (*c.* 1538) or Shakespeare's history plays naturally set the discourse of politics within a framework of religious thinking (for example, about anointed kings and their duty to God as well as England, or the usurper's need to atone for his sin).

Some kinds of drama can be identified as fairly specifically tied to one performance location. Thus Latin liturgical drama can truly be described as 'church drama', since it was written only for performance within a church; the great cycle plays of biblical drama may be described as 'street theatre', since they were specifically written for performance in the streets of a given city; and court mask (or masque)[3] was designed for a single performance at court. But most plays were and had to be adaptable to a number of different performance locations, since most players travelled. From the King's Men to the smallest travelling company (4–6 was normal in the early sixteenth century, but some plays were written for even fewer),[4] companies expected to be able to put on their plays in whatever indoor or outdoor venue a town, village or great house offered them, from halls, inns, churches and chapels to open fields, innyards, churchyards and market-places.[5]

Enter Player

MORE Welcome good friend, what is your will with me?
PLAYER My lord, my fellows and myself
Are come to tender ye our willing service,
So please you to command us.
MORE What, for a play, you mean?
Whom do you serve?
PLAYER My lord Cardinal's grace.
MORE My lord Cardinal's players? Now trust me, welcome.
You happen hither in a lucky time,
To pleasure me, and benefit yourselves.
The mayor of London and some aldermen,

His lady and their wives, are my kind guests
This night at supper. Now, to have a play
Before the banquet will be excellent.
How think you, son Roper?

ROPER 'Twill do well, my lord,
And be right pleasing pastime to your guests.

MORE I prithee tell me, what plays have ye?

PLAYER Diverse, my lord: *The Cradle of Security*,
Hit Nail o'th'Head, *Impatient Poverty*,
The Play of Four P's, *Dives and Lazarus*,
Lusty Juventus, and *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*.

MORE 'The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom'? That, my lads,
I'll none but that, the theme is very good,
And may maintain a liberal argument.
To marry wit to wisdom asks some cunning:
Many have wit, that may come short of wisdom.

Anthony Munday et al, *Sir Thomas More* (1592–3), III.2.45–68

Conceiving the performance space: *locus* and *platea*

The adaptability of performance to different kinds of places can be approached in terms of the overarching framework within which most styles of early performance are to be understood: namely *locus* and *platea* (terms made familiar through the groundbreaking work of Robert Weimann),[6] alternatively known as place and scaffold. This is basically a method of staging, a *use* of space rather than a demarcation or design of space; but it is necessary to understand a little bit about it in order to see how plays could be so adaptable to the various performance venues available before and after the building of designated playhouses. The two terms denote two interconnected ways of using space. While the place or *platea* is basically an open space, the *locus* can be literally a scaffold, but can also be any specifically demarcated space or architectural feature capable of being given representational meaning. Thus a door, an alcove, a scaffold, or a tent can represent a particular location, such as a house, a temple, a country, heaven or hell, or simply 'the place of (for example) Covetousness' (a conceptual rather than a properly physical place). The essential difference between a *locus* (of which there may be several) and the *platea* (which is by definition singular for any one performance) is precisely one of representational function: whereas a *locus* always represents, for a given stretch of time, a specific location, the *platea* is essentially fluid and frequently non-representational. It is not tied to the illusion, to the fictional places where the drama is set, but is often predominantly an actors' space, a space in which performance can be

recognised as performance rather than as the fiction it intermittently seeks to represent.

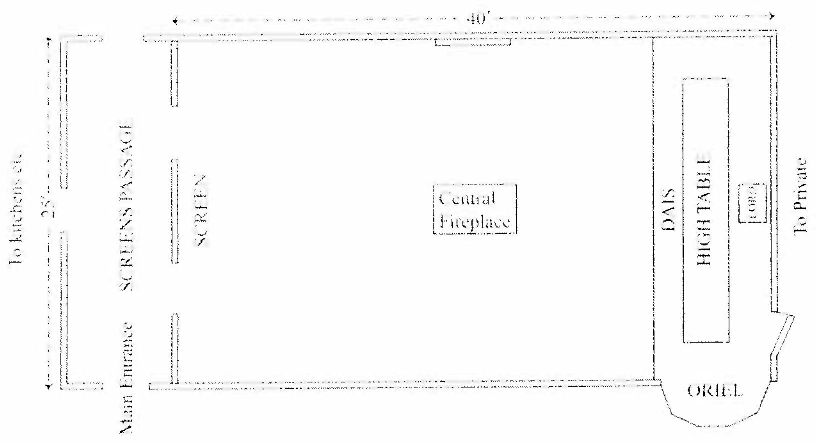
If a comic doctor and his servant, for example, burst into a story about the conversion of a Jew who steals the sacrament, as happens in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (1461–1520), it is no accident that we find them roaming round the *platea*, asking what ailments the audience have, making reference to people and places in the Croxton area, joking and interacting with the audience about familiar aspects of their contemporary world, whilst the characters who people the fictional conversion narrative remain still on their scaffolds. (Though they remain fixed on their scaffolds for the duration of this piece of action, however, they do occasionally cross the platea to get to other locations within the fiction at different points in the play.) Nor is it surprising that when the doctor and his man attempt to mount the scaffold which represents the Jews' house, the Jews beat them away and deny them access. For these two sets of characters embody two different worlds: one which is self-enclosed, illusionary, fictional, separate from the audience; and one which shares the audience's time and space, which is co-existent with them, sharing jokes with them in the knowledge that this is a performance and that two comics are here, now, to give the audience a good time. In the Digby play of *Mary Magdalene* (1480–1520), however, when Mary has to make a journey to Marseilles, she crosses the *platea* in a wheeled ship and arrives, probably, at a scaffold representing the palace of the King of Marseilles.[7] The *platea* is thus temporarily quite strictly representational. For the duration of the ship's crossing, combining seventeen lines of dialogue and some interjected song, it is the sea. But, unlike the scaffolds, which always and only represent single locations such as the King of Marseilles' palace or the castle of Magdalene in Bethany for the entire duration of the production, the *platea* will become many places, and sometimes no particular place, at different points in the action. Indeed, when an angel descends and appears to Mary just before the arrival of the ship, saying 'Abash thee not [be not abashed], Mary, in this place' (l.1376), the fluid meaning of the term 'place' is part of the overall meaning the play seeks to make. 'This place' is simultaneously the general location in which Mary is situated at that point of the narrative (Jerusalem) and the place of performance, where the audience sits in the here and now, seeing and hearing the enactment of past events as they have shaped the present. Moments later, when the ship arrives, the place must be understood to be a non-specific seashore.

The Play of the Sacrament and *Mary Magdalene* were probably performed in very different venues. In neither case do we know exactly where they were performed or how the venue was set up. The Croxton Play may have been staged partly outside and partly inside the parish church of Croxton, while

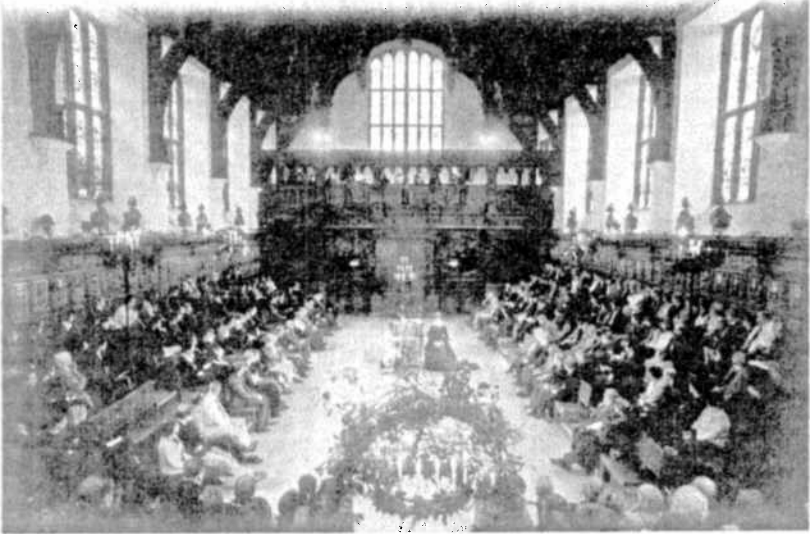
2. A conjectural reconstruction of the *Play of the Sacrament* in Croxton churchyard.

Mary Magdalene may have been staged in a number of different ways, perhaps in a round or a half round or perhaps drawing on the geographical features of a given secular site. What they have in common is the fundamental requirement of a combination of defined structures and open space, and this basic interplay between two kinds of space is deeply rooted in medieval and early modern drama across Europe. If we look at the interiors and exteriors of churches, one of the earliest known venues of performance, we see the potential for *locus* and *platea* staging in the combination of individual architectural features and the open spaces of the nave, the chancel and the 'crossing' (the space where the transept crossed the nave and chancel in cross-shaped churches). If we look at the standard design of great halls in manor houses, at court, in the universities and in the Inns of Court, we can see the potential specificity of features like the screens, the dais, the fireplace and the gallery operating in tension with the open space of the great rectangular frame. If we look at the very few staging diagrams extant in English manuscripts, we see a circular open space surrounded by representational structures.

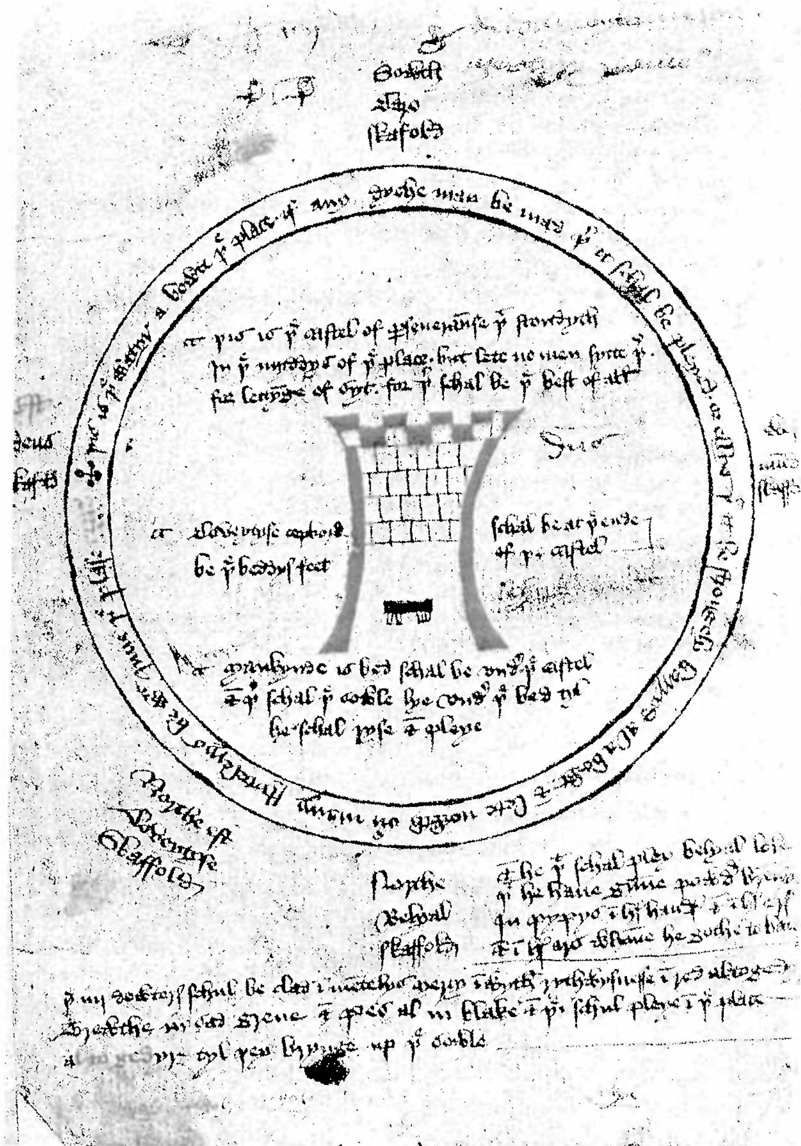
3. A stage erected in the crossing in front of the roodscreen in the cathedral at Laon, 1566, for exorcism ceremonies. From Jean Boulaese, *Manuel de Victoire du Corps de Dieu sur l'Esprit Malin*, Paris 1575.



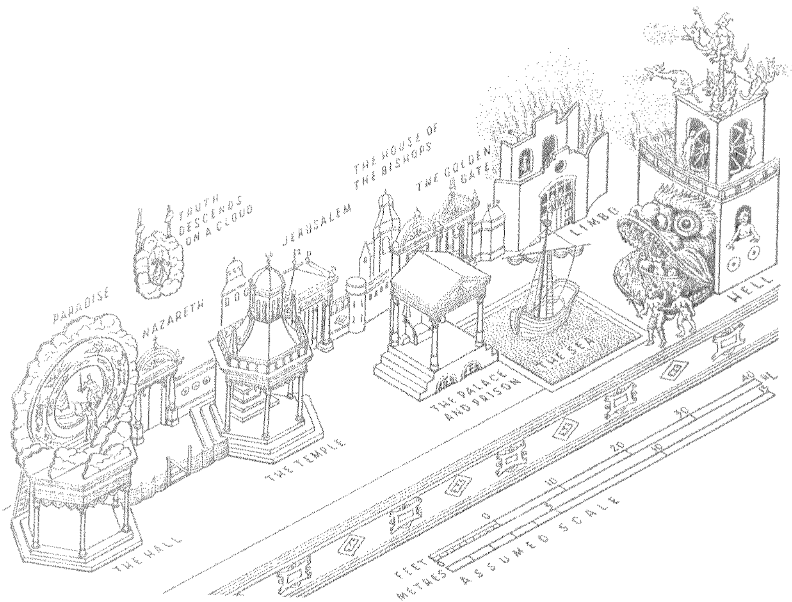
4. Floor plan of a great hall.



5. Performance of *Twelfth Night* in the hall of the Middle Temple, 2 February 2002.



6. Stage plan from the manuscript of *The Castle of Perseverance*, late fifteenth century.



7. Reconstruction of the staging plan for the Valenciennes Passion Play, 1547.

European pictorial evidence suggests that the structures could be arranged in any number of ways: strung out in a line as at Valenciennes or arranged around a market square as at Lucerne. English urban ceremonies, such as coronation processions or royal entries, show the same combination of feature and space in the progression through open streets from one pageant location to another. (It was usual to adorn or build upon existing structures such as conduits, gates and other features: Glynne Wickham's photograph of the early fifteenth-century Market Cross at Shepton Mallet provides a good example of the kind of structure that naturally lent itself to performance in this way.)[8] Scholars are still divided about how much those cycle plays which used pageant wagons also used the street, but both urban ceremony, as described here, and court mask, which often brought elaborate pageant wagons into the open space of the hall and allowed the performers to descend from the wagon to perform in the open space, show clear precedents for a mode of performance that might use pageant wagons in conjunction with the surrounding space. On the other hand, performance on pageant wagons in narrow streets may have had very restricted opportunities to make use of the surrounding space.

A pageant, that is to say, a house of wainscot, painted, and builded on a cart with four wheels.
A square top to set over the said house.
A gryphon, gilt, with a fane [pennant] to set on the said top.
A bigger iron fane to set on the end of the pageant.
. . .
Six horse cloths, stained, with knobs and tassels.

Grocers' Company Records, Norwich, 1565

Then was there a device or a pageant upon wheels brought in, out of the which pageant issued out a gentleman richly appareled, that showed how in a garden of pleasure there was an arbour of gold, wherein were lords and ladies, much desirous to show pleasure and pastime to the Queen and ladies . . . then a great cloth of Arras that did hang before the same pageant was taken away, and the pageant brought more near. It was curiously made and pleasant to behold; it was solemn and rich, for every post or pillar thereof was covered with frise [ornamentally wrought] gold; therein were trees of hawthorn, eglantines, rosiers [rose-trees], vines and other pleasant flowers of divers colours, with gillofers [gillyflowers] and other herbs all made of satin, damask, silk, silver and gold, accordingly as the natural trees, herbs, or flowers ought to be. In which arbour were six ladies, all appareled in white satin and green.

Extract from description of the Golden Arbour pageant of February 1511, Hall's Chronicle (first published 1548)[9]

Simple precedents for this more restricted performance style include trestle and booth stages. A small stage erected on a trestle or barrels is relatively easily transportable in a horse-drawn cart and elevates the performers so that the performance becomes visible and accessible to a wider group of spectators. A curtain with dressing room space behind it at the back of such a stage turns it into a booth stage. It may be that performance on such stages made little use of the surrounding space; but the probability, given the likely range of venues and the strong performance tradition of *locus* and *platea*, is that, as with cycle performance, the possibility of using it was at least intermittently present. As Tydeman's reconstruction sketch of *Mankind* (1465–70) being performed in an innyard suggests, ascent and descent of the stage need not have been a very complicated matter.

What we see, then, is a wide range of individual variations on the basic arrangement of *locus* and *platea*, or spatial features in combination with open space. 'Standardization', as Peter Meredith puts it, 'is the last thing we should expect', even in the staging of similar kinds of events.[10] Whereas the York Corpus Christi cycle was staged over one day, for example, the Chester cycle eventually took place over three; where York and Chester were probably processionally

Lay-out of the Square on the first day 1583

8a. Reconstruction of the staging plan for the first day of the Lucerne Passion Play, 1583.

Lay-out of the Square for the Easter play anno 1583
The Second day

8b. Reconstruction of the staging plan for the second day of the Lucerne Passion Play.

9. Conjectural view of *Mankind* played on a booth stage in an innyard.

staged (that is, played at consecutive 'stations' around the town), N-town was probably staged in a fixed location; where York had twelve to sixteen stations, Chester had only four or five; and where York and Chester were probably performed only in those cities, the N-town plays may have toured.[11] (The name N-town derives from the banns, cited on p. 70 below. 'N' may stand for Latin *nomen*, meaning 'name'.) A wide range of effects, furthermore, could derive from *locus* and *platea* as separate features as well as from the different ways in which they could be scripted to interact with one another. Thus a *locus*, which might be any kind of marked structure, moveable or fixed, curtained or unenclosed, could operate to create a framing effect, offering the action within it as a picture for contemplation. The creation of formal symmetries and significant tableaux, perhaps drawing on existing visual tradition, as in books of hours, illustrated Bibles or other devotional literature, was thus a

10. The Annunciation. Illustration from a fourteenth-century manuscript of *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, at one time attributed to Saint Bonaventure.

possibility, as were other pictorial effects that anticipated the proscenium arch stage. The *platea*, on the other hand, might operate as unframed space, allowing both the boundary between performers and spectators and the space of each to become fluid. The combination of both these opposing modes of performance thus created an immensely flexible variety of staging effects.

Evidence and motives for performance

Most surviving early dramatic records, as a glance through the accumulating volumes of the Records of Early English Drama (REED) series or the Malone Society Collections will show, are accounts, which are by definition primarily concerned with listing and accounting for items of expenditure, not with detailing the place or content of performance. While such records often do tell us something about the geographical location of a performance, and sometimes specify more closely the actual site of performance, it can still be impossible to reconstruct the precise size and disposition of the playing space or, without knowing the content of what was performed, how it was used. Especially in the early period, before the building of permanent playhouses, the extant playtexts do not often coincide with the survival of other kinds of records (except in the case of the Corpus Christi plays) and it can thus also be difficult to tie the plays that survive to particular performance venues.

What we do learn from the extant accounts, however, is something of the range of motivations that could lead to the mounting of a play. The impetus for putting on a play might come from a number of different groups, and while Corpus Christi plays, sometimes mounted by urban trade guilds at the instigation of the city council, constitute the best surviving and best known form of medieval drama now, they were certainly not the most common form of drama in their time.[12] Civic drama, however, highlights an important difference between early and later motivations for staging plays. Where we tend to assume now that making money is the commonest reason for putting on a play and that amateur performances will be negligible in status and impact by comparison with professional theatre, early playing was not underpinned by the same assumptions. Only after the building of fixed theatres did the object of performing become primarily to make money for players, companies and theatre entrepreneurs; and when that began to happen, the level of outrage expressed provides some indication of how relatively new that state of affairs was (see chapter 3 below). Before that aims were more wide ranging, and such profit as was made funded a range of enterprises other than theatre itself.

These aims are of course closely tied to the patron and to the place of performance. The private players of a great lord or king, for example, might play before that lord's own household and his invited guests, and no payment would change hands; the object of the performance would be to entertain (and perhaps also teach) those present (see the exchange between Sir Thomas More and the player, pp. 3–4 above) and at the same time to signal the lord's social standing and largesse. Sometimes there might also be a subsidiary aim in performing a play with a particular message or piece of advice for some or all of the particular guests present. When the same lord's players toured, the function and message changed with different audiences: within the region of the lord's power and influence, his players functioned as a reminder of his position, his wealth and prestige and sometimes also perhaps of the kinds of views he held; outside the region they advertised the lord's status more widely and brought his name to the minds of those who might otherwise not think of him; and both the messages of the play's content and the social statement of the players' name and affiliation functioned differently in a town hall or a village square from the way they might function in the hall of another lord.

The interlude *Hick Scorner* (*c.* 1514), for example, was probably sponsored by Charles Brandon, favourite of Henry VIII, and performed at his London residence of Suffolk Place in Southwark. Its many local and topographical references to the London area, as Ian Lancashire has shown, would have made a particular kind of sense in the context of that performance. When Free Will enters with a rope and fetters saying:

> A, see! A, see, sirs, what I have brought!
> A medicine for a pair of sore shins.
> At the King's Bench, sirs, I have you sought,
> (lines 510–12)

his remark would have had especial relevance to both the location and the patron, since the King's Bench prison was located in Southwark and Charles Brandon himself was marshal of the prison in 1514.[13] If the play was performed outside Southwark, such closely topical lines would have had no special impact and may have been cut or altered for different performance venues.

We know of at least three specific places of performance for John Bale's *King John* (*c.* 1538), besides several more probable venues. Sponsored by Thomas Cromwell, the King's Secretary and Lord Privy Seal, the play was performed in St Stephen's Church in Canterbury in September 1538; before an invited audience in Archbishop Cranmer's household during the Christmas season of 1538–9; and in London, possibly at Cromwell House, in January 1539.[14] It may also have been taken on tour by Bale's company, almost certainly to be

identified with Cromwell's own players, and was possibly performed at any of the range of places they toured, from York to Shrewsbury, Thetford, Cambridge and others.[15] The reason so much information survives about performances of this one play is partly due, as so often, to accounts (Cromwell's accounts list two payments to 'Bale and his fellows' for playing before him in September 1538 and January 1539), and partly to the fact that it caused trouble at a time when religious issues were highly sensitive. The production at Cranmer's residence aroused the audience to strong feelings for and against the Roman church, as the depositions taken from two witnesses, John Alford and Thomas Brown below, show.

> John Alford, of the age of 18 years, examined, saith that he had been in Christmas time at my Lord of Canterbury's, and there had heard an interlude concerning King John, about 8 or 9 of the clock at night; and Thursday, the second day of January last past, spake these words following in the house of the said Thomas Brown: That it is pity that the Bishop of Rome should reign any longer, for if he should, the said Bishop would do with our King as he did with King John. Whereunto (this deponent saith) that Henry Totehill answered and said, That it was pity and naughtily [wickedly] done, to put down the Pope and Saint Thomas; for the Pope was a good man, and Saint Thomas saved many such as this deponent was from hanging; which words were spoken in the presence of Thomas Browne and one William, servant unto the said Totehill.
>
> Deposition of John Alford, January 1539

> Thomas Brown, of the age of 50 years, examined, saith that about 8 of the clock on Friday the 3 day of January last past, as he remembreth, one Henry Totehill being in this deponent's house at Shawltcliff, this deponent told that he had been at my Lord of Canterbury's, and there had heard one of the best matters that ever he saw, touching King John; and then said that he had heard divers times priests and clerks say that King John did look like one that had run from burning of a house, but this deponent knew now that it was nothing true; for, as far as he perceived, King John was as noble a prince as ever was in England; and thereby we might perceive that he was the beginner of the putting down of the Bishop of Rome, and thereof we might be all glad. Then answered the said Totehill that the Bishop of Rome was made Pope by the clergy and by the consent of all the kings Christian. Then said this deponent, 'Hold your peace, for this communication is naught [wickedness]'. Then said Totehill, 'I am sorry if I have said amiss, for I thought no harm to no man'.
>
> Deposition of Thomas Browne, January 1539

Evidently, as will be discussed further in chapter 5 below, Cromwell's aim in sponsoring a play like *King John*, with its clear anti-Catholic thrust, was specifically propagandist. He wanted audiences to hear and respond to Bale's hostility to Rome and to turn positively towards the separatism that

Henry VIII sought to foster at that particular moment in time. Thomas Browne's deposition shows that he understood perfectly well that the climate of the time made Henry Totehill's views unspeakable. But all over England, wherever this play was performed, there must have been regional and individual differences in its reception, just as even here, in the Archbishop of Canterbury's own residence, the seat of the emergent Church of England, some individuals retained a strong loyalty to the Catholic past while others were either convinced that the Reformers were right or willing to subscribe to those views even if privately they retained some doubts. If the play toured in East Anglia, the region where John Bale himself had for twenty-four years before his conversion to the Reformist cause been a Carmelite friar, or in other locations with which he had a personal connection (York, Doncaster and Cambridge, for example), familiarity, personality and memory must have made some very specific contributions to the meanings of *King John* when performed in those areas.

Regionality is a very important aspect of dramatic performance throughout the period covered by this book. Regional cultures and economies differed very greatly from one another and, for reasons as yet insufficiently understood, the drama produced in different regions (or the apparent absence of drama in others) varied tremendously. The Corpus Christi cycles, for example, were primarily a northern and midland phenomenon. Extant cycle plays were performed at York, Chester and perhaps Wakefield (though evidence for the Towneley plays as a Wakefield cycle is coming increasingly under fire); lost cycles were probably performed at Beverley, Coventry, Newcastle, Norwich and perhaps also in some of the following: Doncaster, Durham, Exeter, Hereford, Kendal, Lancaster, Lincoln, Louth, Northampton, Preston and Stamford (though references to 'pageants' do not always mean plays, and references to Corpus Christi pageants or plays do not necessarily indicate the existence of extended play-cycles).[16] A Cornish-language cycle is also extant. The N-Town cycle, which, unlike the other extant cycles, is an amalgamation of material separately conceived and, as collected in the N-Town manuscript, probably intended for touring, is associated with East Anglia. Recent scholars have argued for Thetford or Bury St Edmunds as its primary location.[17] The evidence of dialect makes an East Anglian location at some point in the cycle's history a certainty, though it need not absolutely point us in the direction of East Anglia as its point of origin.

Outside the cycle plays, however, it is to East Anglia that extant evidence points again and again as the location of dramatic performance. East Anglia was, during the late medieval period, economically and culturally the most flourishing region of England outside London.[18] Its records are especially rich in demonstrating different sponsors, stimuli and communities for dramatic

performance, and most of the medieval non-cycle plays in extant manuscripts are recorded in East Anglian dialect. The Carmelite houses at Maldon and Ipswich, where Bale was appointed prior in 1530 and 1533 respectively, were involved in plays and pageants; Mettingham College, a small community of secular canons in Suffolk, paid regularly for visiting entertainments; twenty-seven villages got together to fund a St George play in Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire, in 1511; twenty-five places around Great Dunmow in Essex gave money every year for twenty-five years to fund collective performances for the broad community; and so on. Religious and secular communities alike sought to mount and/or view theatrical performance; and in many instances the two were not divided, but were working together as one parish or community, to organise a play for entertainment, education or some more specific and immediate end, like repairing a church steeple or rebuilding a bridge.

Once fixed playhouses began to be built in London, the difference between London and the other regions of England in theatrical terms became even more marked. While playing in inns and innyards, for example, represented a tradition widely shared across different regions, very few purpose-built theatres were constructed outside London during this early period of theatre-building. Three or four dedicated provincial playhouses outside London are known for the period, in York, Bristol (possibly two) and Prescot in Lancashire.[19] The city of London authorities, furthermore, were using the increasing prominence of playhouses as an excuse to shut down playing in inns within city limits. Though the players continued to defy the authorities with some success during the 1580s and early 1590s, no performances at London city inns are recorded after 1596.

> it appeared unto me that it was your honour's pleasure I should give order for the stay of all plays within the city, in that Mr Tilney [Master of the Revels] did utterly mislike the same. According to which your lordship's good pleasure, I presently sent for such players as I could hear of: so as there appeared yesterday before me the Lord Admiral's and the Lord Strange's players, to whom I specially gave in charge and required them in her Majesty's name to forbear playing until further order might be given for their allowance in that respect. Whereupon, the Lord Admiral's players very dutifully obeyed; but the others, in very contemptuous manner, departing from me, went to the Cross Keys and played that afternoon, to the great offence of the better sort that knew they were prohibited by order from your lordship. Which, as I might not suffer, so I sent for the said contemptuous persons, who having no reason to allege for their contempt, I could do no less but this evening commit some of them to one of the compters [prisons], and do mean, according to your lordship's direction, to prohibit all playing until your lordship's pleasure therein be further known.
>
> Letter from Mayor of London to Lord Burghley, 6 November 1589

Despite this growing difference between London, with its dedicated playhouses, and the regions, with their variety of ad hoc playing places, those players who performed in the London theatres continued to tour very extensively. Indeed the most famous company of the 1580s, the Queen's Men, formed by royal command in 1583, was on tour more frequently than it played in London. It was not until the 1590s that the stranglehold of London-based fixed theatres really began to shift the emphasis away from touring; and in a sense the indication that that point had been reached is the gradual demise of the Queen's Men (see further chapter 2 below). Prior to this, however, and to some extent long after, even those plays written for London companies performing in London playhouses had to be adaptable to a range of different venues at court and on tour. The company might be called to play at any number of different court venues, from the large halls at Whitehall and Hampton Court to the smaller halls and chambers of Richmond and St James' Palace or to locations the court might be visiting, such as Wilton House in Wiltshire or Christ Church Hall in Oxford. Such adaptability was made possible by two central and linked aspects of theatrical performance across the whole period: the basic similarity of design across many indoor spaces, from the great hall to the guildhall, and the staging tradition of *locus* and *platea*.

We may consider this need for flexibility through a brief look at what is perhaps the single best-known play of the whole period: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1600–1). The title page of the first quarto spells out in general terms three of the places where the play has been performed. We should note, first of all, that 'the city of London' is very specific and is unlikely to include reference to the performance venue that most automatically comes to mind for *Hamlet*: the Chamberlain's Men's own playhouse, the Globe. For the Globe was outside the limits of the city of London, in the liberty of the Clink, in Southwark (see further p. 46 below). It is difficult to know quite where the reference points to, since playing at city inns had been banned since before the first performance of *Hamlet*, and the Blackfriars Theatre, in a liberty geographically located inside the city walls, was not yet occupied by the Chamberlain's Men. The reference to the two universities is equally hard to interpret, since there is no external corroboration of the claim on record and the universities made a point of suppressing professional performance within a five-mile range of the city centre. Indeed both are on record as paying the players to go away rather than perform on occasion. Nevertheless a letter from the Privy Council to the chancellors of both universities in July 1593 implies by its very insistence on the need to suppress such performances that they were still successfully taking place in some instances: 'common players do ordinarily resort to the University of Cambridge there to recite interludes and plays'.[20]

THE

Tragicall Hiſtorie of

HAMLET

Prince of Denmarke

By William Shake-ſpeare.

As it hath beene diuerſe times acted by his Highneſſe ſeruants in the Cittie of London : as alſo in the two Vniuerſities of Cambridge and Oxford, and elſe-where

At London printed for N.L. and Iohn Trundell. 1603.

11. Title page of the first quarto of *Hamlet*, 1603.

The point of considering the *Hamlet* title page here, however, is not so much to tie down the specific venues of performance as to indicate their range and variety. We may not be able to track down the precise venues involved but we can draw conclusions about the routine touring and adaptability of performance, even of plays strongly associated with permanent playhouses. This range of venues demands high adaptability of the company, who must move from the raised stage of a large outdoor amphitheatre like the Globe to performance in an indoor hall of varying size, with or without a raised stage. Yet one performance location influences another, and one effect of the flexibility of this period is that even the most seemingly disparate locations will have some features in common with one another (see further below, pp. 48–9). The universities had a long tradition of temporary stages that could be set up in college halls, thus allowing college performances to vary between conditions resembling household performance, on the floor of the great hall, and conditions closer to those that came to prevail in the permanent playhouses, with a raised stage for the players. (Court performance, it may be noted in passing, sometimes raised the spectators on scaffolds while positioning the players on the floor of the hall.)

We may close this brief discussion of *Hamlet* with one further recorded venue, this time of an amateur performance: a staging of the play on board ship.

> I invited Captain Hawkins to a fish dinner, and had *Hamlet* acted aboard me, which I permit to keep my people from idleness and unlawful games, or sleep
>
> Extract from journal of William Keeling, captain of an East India Company ship, 31 March 1608[21]

This last example, though it has nothing to do with the range of venues that a professional company might play, should act as a reminder of the vast and unpredictable range of factors that may stimulate the performance of a play, and of how random the surviving record of such performance may be.

Festival time

Though the terms 'religious' and 'secular' are almost unavoidable and will continue to be used in this book, the present chapter opened with the contention that such binarism is falsely imposed on a culture in which religious and secular life were so closely intertwined as to be at times almost indistinguishable. In no area of everyday life was this truer than in the experience of time. People at all

social levels, from courtiers to monks and to peasants, lived their lives within a structure organised by religious festivals. Sunday, a day of rest for those who laboured and a day of worship for most (worship ordered by statute for the latter part of the period as the duty of every parishioner),[22] punctuated the weekly cycle with predictable regularity, while the great festivals of Christmas, Easter and Whitsun, together with a host of other saints' days and high points of the Christian calendar, scripted the spaces for festivity into more everyday routine. Many festivals, such as Midsummer, were primarily pagan festivals, and these tended to be grouped together in the second half of the year, from summer to Christmas, with Christian festivals dominating the period from Christmas to summer. But it is doubtful whether the distinction between religious and secular festivals was widely recognised in practice. A festival such as Lammastide, for example, brought together a religious feast (St Peter Ad Vincula) with a secular occasion (harvest) in such a way as to make the two kinds of celebration seem codependent. Even the more literate and aware of the population, who understood the meaning of at least some specific festivals, may not have noticed a great deal of difference in the living through of one or another.

Certainly festival time was play time, even for those in religious orders (though this would be the group most likely to perceive a significant distinction between religious and secular festivals). Even monks and friars paid players to entertain them at Christmas, just as courts and households did. Though church festivals were times of reverence and religious celebration, they were also, and probably primarily, for the vast mass of the population, holidays. The performance of drama was always, in this early period, tied to festivals or other special occasions. Even after the establishment of fixed theatres began to move the culture away from this association with festival to a situation where plays were routine and 'everyday', at least in the capital city, private performances at court and elsewhere remained closely linked to festivals and special occasions. Sometimes the festive status of the day or time prohibited performance. Performances in the public theatres were forbidden on Sundays and during Lent, and very few plays were performed at court after Ash Wednesday during the period of Shakespeare's lifetime, though that changed in the later Stuart years, when plays became more routine throughout the year. Not all the occasions on which drama was performed would be religious, of course, but the general framing principle that performance was occasional as opposed to routine was only just coming into question in this period, and remained part of the cultural understanding of what performance was even as the playhouses challenged that understanding in practice.

Festivals were also naturally associated with the performance of ritual as well as with the performance of plays or drama, though this distinction between

Table 1.1 *A calendar of the principal festivals and feast days in Elizabethan England*

RITUALISTIC HALF		PROFANE OR SECULAR HALF	
25 December	Christmas – Nativity (Midwinter)		*Sheep-shearing*
26 December	Twelve Days of Christmas	24 June	Saint John the Baptist (Midsummer)
28 December	Holy Innocents	15 July	Saint Swithin
1 January	New Year		*Rush-bearing*
6 January	Epiphany	1 August	Lammas
7 January	Rock Monday	15 August	Assumption
7–14 January	*Plough Monday*		*Harvest-home*
21 January	Saint Agnes' Day	14 September	Holyrood Day
2 February	Candlemas	29 September	Michaelmas
3 February–9 March	*Shrove Tuesday*		*Parish wakes*
4 February–10 March	*Ash Wednesday*	28 October	Saint Simon & Saint Jude (Lord Mayor's Show)
14 February	Saint Valentine's Day	1 November	All Saints' Day
15 March–18 April	*Palm Sunday*	2 November	All Souls' Day
22 March–25 April	*Easter*	5 November	Guy Fawkes' Day
25 March	Lady Day (Annunciation)	11 November	Martinmas
30 March–3 May	*Hock Monday*	16 November	Saint Edmund's Day
31 March–4 May	*Hock Tuesday*	17 November	Accession Day of Queen Elizabeth
23 April	Saint George's Day	23 November	Saint Clement's Day
27/28/29 April–31 May–1/2 June	*Rogations*	25 November	Saint Catherine's Day
30 April–3 June	*Ascension*	30 November	Saint Andrew's Day (Advent)
1 May	May Day (Saint Philip & Saint James)	6 December	Saint Nicholas' Day
10 May–13 June	*Whitsun*	21 December	Saint Thomas' Day
17 May–20 June	*Trinity*		
21 May–24 June	*Corpus Christi*		

Note: The moveable feasts of the Church and the main non-calendary festivals (of peasants and parish) appear in italics. The dates correspond to the earlier and later limits for the moveable feasts given in the Book of Common Prayer.

ritual and drama constitutes another example of a binary that we apply to early theatre at our peril. Take, for example, the coronation of a king or queen. This was one of the most special of special occasions, a festival which combined religious with secular significance. Coronation itself was a religious ceremony akin to baptism: the king or queen would be anointed with holy oil in an elaborate ritual usually performed in Westminster Abbey. And the procession, even the spectators, were as much a part of the spectacle and performance as was the religious ceremony.

his grace, with the Queen, departed from the Tower through the city of London, against whose coming the streets where his Grace should pass were hanged with tapestry and cloth of Arras; and the great part of the south side of Cheap [Cheapside] with cloth of gold, and some part of Cornhill also; and the streets railed and barred, on the one side, from over against Grace Church unto Bread Street in Cheapside, where every occupation stood, in their liveries in order, beginning with base and mean occupations, and so ascending to the worshipful crafts. Highest and lastly stood the Mayor, with the aldermen. The goldsmiths' stalls, unto the end of the Old Change [Exchange], being replenished with virgins in white, with branches of white wax; the priests and clerks, in rich copes with crosses and censers of silver, with censing [perfuming with incense] his grace, and the Queen also as they passed . . .

Also before the King's Highness rode two gentlemen, richly appareled, and about their bodies traverse [across], they did bear two robes, the one of the Duchy of Guienne and the other for the Duchy of Normandy, with hats on their heads powdered [speckled] with ermines, for the estate of the same. Next followed two persons of good estate, the one bearing his cloak, the other his hat, appareled both in goldsmiths' work and broidery [embroidery], their horses trapped in burned [burnished] silver, drawn over with cords of green silk and gold, the edges and borders of their apparel being fretted [interlaced] with gold of damask. After them came Sir Thomas Brandon, Master of the King's Horse, clothed in tissue [rich cloth, often interwoven with gold or silver], broidered with roses of fine gold, and traverse his body a great baldric [strap worn diagonally over the shoulder and across the chest] of gold, great and massy, his horse trapped in gold, leading by a rein of silk the King's spare horse trapped bard wise [with a covering for breast and flanks], with harness broidered with bullion gold, curiously wrought by goldsmiths. Then next followed the nine children of honour, upon great coursers, appareled on their bodies in blue velvet, powdered with flower delices [fleurs de lys] of gold, and chains of goldsmiths' work, every one of their horses trapped with a trapper of the King's title, as of England and France, Gascony, Guienne, Normandy, Anjou, Cornwall, Wales, Ireland, etc. wrought upon velvets with embroidery and goldsmiths' work.

Then next following in order, came the Queen's retinue, as lords, knights, esquires, and gentlemen in their degrees, well mounted, and richly appareled in tissues, cloth of gold, of silver, tinsels [cloth interwoven with gold or silver] and velvets embroidered, fresh and goodly to behold. The Queen, then by name

Katherine, sitting in her litter, borne by two white palfreys, the litter covered and richly appareled and the palfreys trapped in white cloth of gold, her person appareled in white satin embroidered, her hair hanging down to her back, of a very great length, beautiful and goodly to behold, and on her head a coronal, set with many rich orient stones . . .

The morrow following being Sunday, and also Midsummer Day, this noble Prince with his Queen, at time convenient, under their canopies borne by the Barons of the Five Ports, went from the said Palace to Westminster Abbey upon cloth called vulgarly cloth of ray [striped cloth], the which cloth was cut and spoiled by the rude and common people immediately after their repair into the Abbey, where, according to the sacred observance and ancient custom, his Grace with the Queen were anointed and crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, with other prelates of the realm there present, and the nobility, with a great multitude of commons of the same. It was demanded of the people, whether they would receive, obey and take the same most noble Prince for their king, who with great reverence, love, and desire, said and cried, yea, yea.

Extract from description of Henry VIII's coronation,
June 1509, Hall's Chronicle (first published 1548)

Were we to study coronations more fully, we would find that scripted pageants, usually constructed around allegorical, biblical or historical personages, were often staged along the procession route as a further embellishment of the performance; that the banquet, with its traditional challenger riding in to challenge any man to contest the king's right to rule, overlapped in its mode of performance with costly and extended jousts, often framed within a fictional allegorical setting; and that these in turn overlapped with elaborate indoor disguisings carrying on the allegorical fiction, and extending into the social side of the festivities with music and dancing. To divide the coronation performance up under either binary so far discussed, then (religious/secular or ritual/drama), would have made little sense to a contemporary audience. The magnificent 'secular' celebration at the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520 included a spectacular mass alongside the feasting, jousting and masking. Both constituted one continuous performance over several days, highlighting different aspects at different times, surely, but never completely abandoning ritual for drama or drama for ritual. To understand this kind of performance is to understand its wholeness as well as its component parts.

Saturday, the 23rd [of June], a platform was built in the camp, and near it a chapel, a fathom and a half high, on pillars. It contained an altar and reliquaries, and at the side were two canopies of cloth of gold, with chairs for the legates of England and France, and the cardinals of France, and seats below for the French bishops. On another side were seats for the ambassadors of the Pope, the King of Spain, the Venetians and others . . . [T]he legates and cardinals started at

10 o'clock to go to the chapel, all in red camlet [soft silk or woollen cloth], and seated themselves under the canopies . . . The English chanters began by saying *tierce* [the third canonical hour of the day], which done, the English legate and the deacons, etc. changed their dress, and put on very rich vestments. The two Kings mounted the platform, and kneeled at the oratory, Francis on the right, and Henry on the left. The Queens did the like. . . . About noon the English legate commenced the high mass *De Trinitate*. The first introit was sung by the English chanters, the second by the French . . . The Cardinal de Bourbon, who brought the Gospel to the Kings to kiss, presented it first to Francis. He desired Henry to kiss it first, but he refused the honour. While the preface was being said, a great artificial salamander or dragon, four fathoms long, and full of fire, appeared in the air, from Ardre. Many were frightened, thinking it a comet, or some monster, as they could see nothing to which it was attached. It passed right over the chapel to Guisnes, as fast as a footman can go, and as high as a bolt shot from a crossbow . . . [T]he *Pax* [a tablet passed round for the kiss of peace] was presented to Cardinal Bourbon to take to the two Kings, who observed the same ceremony as before; then to the two Queens, who also declined to kiss it first, and, after many mutual respects, kissed each other instead. The benediction was given by the English legate, and one of the English secretaries made a Latin oration at the bottom of the chapel . . . The platforms and galleries, which contained great numbers of people, were so well arranged that everyone could see.

Extract translated from an anonymous
French description of the Field of Cloth of Gold (1520)

The closeness between ritual and drama is as true at the everyday level as at the level of special occasion, especially in the pre-Reformation period. Indeed the Reformers, as noted above, were hostile to both theatre and Catholicism partly because they saw each as an expression of the other. Protestantism, in embracing the inner life as primary and rejecting the necessity for intermediaries, was a movement against the ritual enactment of faith through intermediaries. It is notable, for example, that Hall's Chronicle, which lavishes twenty-eight folio pages on describing the Field of Cloth of Gold, has only a few sentences on the mass. The religious climate at the time of writing (after Henry VIII's divorce and separation of the English church from Rome) made such attention to Catholic ritual undesirable and possibly dangerous to publish. Thus the seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, penance, marriage, ordination, the Eucharist and the last rites) shrank to two (baptism and marriage) in Protestant theology, and ritual occupied a much smaller part of everyday life. But throughout the fifteenth century people who went to mass regularly experienced its drama in a deeply embedded and embodied way in their lives. Since the laity made confession and received the sacrament very rarely, normally only once a year, the elevation of the host (the sacramental wafer consumed

12. Elevation of the host. From a Roman missal of the second half of the fourteenth century.

in the mass) was the high point of the mass for them, and many rushed from church to church in order to catch the moment of elevation more than once. The ritual of elevation was already theatrical, with its focus on special vessels, its accompanying bell-ringing, incense and candles and the dramatic gesture of elevation itself; and the practice of witnessing the elevation through a tiny aperture in the rood screen gave the event even more charisma, literally framing the act of viewing in as prominent a way as any curtains or stage could have done. Some priests made the ritual of elevation very theatrical indeed, and the church issued specific instructions and warnings about precisely how it was to be performed.

> It is ordained to priests that, when they begin the canon of the mass, as *Qui pridie*, holding the host, they should not immediately raise it too high so that it can be seen by the people; rather, only keep it in front of their chests while they say *hoc est corpus meum* and then they should elevate it so that it can be seen by all.
>
> Statute from Synod of Paris, 1198–1203

A few churches had machinery capable of making it truly spectacular, and Miri Rubin cites several bequests of money for enhancing the drama of church ritual.[23]

> I bequeath . . . in honour of the sacrament, to make [a machine] which will rise and descend at the high altar, as angels go up and down, between the elevation of Christ's body and blood, and the end of the chant, *Ne nos inducas in temptacionem* [the Lord's Prayer].
>
> Extract from the will of Thomas Goisman, alderman of Hull, 1502

The dragon made to hover miraculously above the mass at the Field of Cloth of Gold (box, pp. 27–8 above) is a particularly outstanding example of the kind of spectacle that might be staged when cost was no object. Its affinities with the mechanical descent of angels in street pageants or plays are obvious, though in both cases the aim is to inspire by amazement rather than primarily to trick spectators. Reformers, however, naturally delighted in exposing some of the machinery found in churches as cheap fakery.

> the image of the rood that was at the Abbey of Boxley, in Kent, called the Rood of Grace, was brought to Paul's Cross, and there, at the sermon made by the Bishop of Rochester, the abuses of the vices[24] and engines, used in old time in the said image, was declared, which image was made of paper and clouts [patches, not necessarily of cloth] from the legs upward; each legs and arms [*sic*] were of timber; and so the people had been eluded [baffled] and caused to do great idolatry by the said image.
>
> Wriothesley's Chronicle (mid-sixteenth century), entry for 1538
>
> [The Boxley Rood incorporated springs and vices that could make it bow, shake its limbs, roll its eyes and move its lips in response to worshippers.]

The dramatic element in worship did not need to be quite so spectacular, of course. Preachers, for example, cultivated theatrical skills in order to touch the hearts of the listeners, and friars especially were known for their charismatic preaching. They typically added stories and songs to their teaching, sometimes singing religious lyrics to familiar secular tunes in order to make them attractive and memorable to the hearers. (On occasion the proximity of secular and

religious culture could produce accidental confusion, as in the story, told by Gerald of Wales, of the priest who was kept awake by dancers singing secular songs in the churchyard and, instead of beginning mass with the familiar '*Dominus vobiscum*' [the Lord be with you], found himself repeating the words of the song: 'sweet leman [lover], thine are [mercy]').[25] Chaucer's Pardoner offers us a picture of how a travelling preacher might use rhetorical tricks and props (relics) to terrify his audience into repentance (and hence charitable offerings), and a fifteenth-century manuscript tells of a real preacher who 'to strike terror into his audience' suddenly pulled a human skull out from under his cloak as part of his performance.[26]

Processions too were a dramatic ritual routinely incorporated into everyday life. They might incorporate any or all of a range of props and costumes, including flowers, rushes, bells, crosses, flags, special liveries or other symmetrical dress. Floats and tableaux might further enhance the visual display, and, in the case of a Corpus Christi procession, the sacred host would be carried in a precious vessel, on or in a tabernacle structure placed on a bier and under a special canopy. As with the festivals themselves, processions were not necessarily perceived by the participants as either religious or secular. Processions accompanied urban midsummer celebrations and rural ceremonies such as beating the bounds (an annual ritual reaffirming parish boundaries by ritually walking them through) as well as religious feasts, and many secular rituals would display religious features.

Festivals were not merely dramatic in themselves, but often also the stimulus for other dramatic forms. The creation of a new festival could prompt the creation of a new dramatic form, and the demise of a religious ritual could equally precipitate the passing of an old dramatic form. Thus the establishment of the feast of Corpus Christi (meaning literally 'body of Christ' – a feast celebrating the Eucharist, the sacrament confirming the real presence of the body of Christ in the mass) in 1311 was soon celebrated with processions across Europe and, at some later date in the fourteenth century, gave rise in England to the great civic play-cycles. The earliest record of an extant cycle is that of York, in 1378, but the plays may well have been in existence for some time before that date either at York or elsewhere. The relationship between processions and play-cycles is not clear. Though processions may have included actors on floats representing tableaux of biblical events, there is no evidence that the plays evolved out of the processions, or even that plays and processions routinely existed side by side in the same place (though they did at York up to 1426, when Friar William Melton persuaded the city authorities to move the plays to the day before the procession, in order to avoid 'feastings, drunkenness, clamours, gossipings, and other wantonness' on the same day as the religious procession).[27] It so

happened, moreover, that the new church feast, a moveable feast scheduled for celebration on the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday, could sometimes roughly coincide with the pagan festival of Midsummer, thus bringing religious and secular celebration into conjunction again.

The decline of the old religion brought with it a hostility to ritual and processional practices (see further chapters 3 and 5 below). Despite the hostility of the Reformed church to both ritual and theatre, however, both continued to flourish in changing forms. Even an evangelical like John Bale, whose own conversion to the Reformist cause from a devout and traditional branch of Catholicism, the Carmelite order, made him especially zealous in denigrating the old religion, and in condemning its idolatry and theatricality, sought out new forms of drama through which to express that zeal and convert others to the cause, rather than turn his back on the theatre completely. John Foxe, author of the best-known piece of Protestant polemic of the latter sixteenth century, commonly known as the *Book of Martyrs*, expressed the opinion that 'players, printers, preachers be set up of God as a triple bulwark against the triple crown of the Pope, to bring him down' and wrote Latin plays himself.[28] And Queen Elizabeth, keen to establish a church settlement that would curb the violence of polemic at either extreme, simultaneously maintained some of the old Catholic ritual in her own form of worship (keeping candles and a crucifix on the altar of her private chapel) and expressed her espousal of Reformed religion in long-established ritual forms (as in the coronation pageant in which she kissed a copy of the English Bible handed to her by the allegorical figure of Truth; see chapter 5 below). Indeed, one prominent area of social practice in which ritual continued to dominate and theatre in the narrower sense became ever more dominant, was the court, which set the example for the rest of the population to follow.

Court

The court had always been a centre of both ritual practice and theatrical patronage. It traditionally performed its own magnificence through a series of rituals, so that even the most potentially mundane of events became a ritual performance at court. The monarch, whether getting up, having dinner, resting or taking part in more obviously ceremonial activities, like public banquets, the reception of foreign ambassadors or the admission of knights to the Order of the Garter, was always on display, always performing. And this formal aspect of the royal household was to some degree replicated in noble or wealthy

households throughout the land, where hierarchy and social order were enacted and reaffirmed in every movement.

> [Wolsey moved through his house] with two great crosses of silver borne before him; with also two great pillars of silver, and his sergeant-at-arms with a great mace of silver gilt. Then his gentlemen-ushers cried, and said: 'On, my lords and masters! Make way for my Lord's Grace!' Thus passed he down from his chamber through the hall. And when he came to the hall door, there was attendant [waiting] for him his mule, trapped altogether in crimson velvet and gilt stirrups. When he was mounted, with his cross bearers and pillar bearers also upon great horses trapped with red scarlet, then marched he forward, with his train and furniture [accoutrements] in manner as I have declared, having about him four footmen with gilt pole-axes in their hands.
>
> George Cavendish, *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey* (1554)

The court itself was peripatetic at this period (though Whitehall Palace came increasingly to be regarded as the monarch's principal abode under the Stuarts), which was another factor taking courtly performance further afield than would now be the case. Queen Elizabeth in particular was noted for her progresses and her sometimes sudden visits to take up residence with courtiers and subjects, visits which put them under immense strain while they tried literally to keep court in their lesser houses and with their lesser resources. This was not merely a matter of feeding and accommodating the Queen and her retinue in the manner to which they were accustomed, but also of entertaining them with a degree of lavishness that would show proper love and respect. Many of the entertainments subjects offered to their monarch while on progress were published for the population at large to read; but perhaps the most famous is the entertainment laid on by the Earl of Leicester at his home of Kenilworth for Queen Elizabeth in 1575. The place of performance for such an entertainment, over several days, was the estate of Kenilworth itself, which was showcased through the flexible and varied use of its space for spectacular and astounding entrances. At one point the Lady of the Lake arrived 'from the midst of the pool, where upon a moveable island, bright blazing with torches, she floating to land, met her Majesty'. Mechanical descents were planned for Mercury in a cloud and Iris in a rainbow, but could not be performed due to 'lack of opportunity and seasonable weather'.[29]

When the court moved between the monarch's own palaces, however, and was host to the range of entertainments necessary both to keep the court amused and to impress foreign visitors, the places of performance varied from tiltyards and temporary buildings to indoor halls and chambers of varying sizes, depending on the nature and context of the performance. Temporary

buildings were one type of space in which the building itself constituted part of the performance in a particularly marked way. Some of these buildings, such as the famous ones built under Henry VIII for the meeting with Francis I at the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520 and the meeting with the Emperor Charles V immediately following, at Calais, were designed for that once-only meeting, and their function was primarily to dazzle the beholders with a sense of the power and prestige of a monarch capable of mounting such a one-off display. The buildings were hugely spectacular, and contemporary descriptions of them run to many pages. English temporary building tradition tended to combine a lower level of brick building, rising to about three feet of the building's total height, with a canvas superstructure, painted with a *trompe l'oeil* effect to look like brick, marble or some other permanent substance. Numerous glass windows sought to overwhelm the visitor with a sense of light in the interior, while silks and brocades were spread upon the floors and ceilings, further embellished with cut and embossed patterns and much gold and silver. The aim was to produce an effect of wonder: the building was to perform a level of spectacle that no building had performed before. The Calais banqueting house, for instance, known as the Roundhouse, was '800 foot round, after a goodly device, builded upon masts of ships in such manner as I think was never seen, for in it was the whole sphere portrayed'.[30] The Calais Roundhouse reveals not only the way such buildings functioned as more than mere spaces for entertainment, but the level of risk to which their fragility exposed them. A high wind blew the roof off before it could be put to use, and the whole company and entertainment had to move into the cramped space of the Exchequer. Such an outcome was always the risk of a temporary building; and the more expense and labour lavished on the building, the greater the statement it made against that background of risk. The building, even as it was destroyed, performed its owner's *sprezzatura* (the term is from Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* and names the quality of carelessness, of seeming to perform gracefully entirely without effort, which he recommends his ideal courtier to cultivate).

Temporary banqueting houses became gradually less temporary as the period developed. Where a Henrician banqueting house, if it survived the weather, would typically be left standing for a short while so that beholders could continue to come and marvel at it after the event for which it was constructed, later banqueting houses tended to become semi-permanent. The wooden Elizabethan banqueting house built at Whitehall in 1581–2 for a visit by the Duke of Alençon remained standing until it was demolished in 1606 to make way for a new banqueting house for James I; and the 1607 building

13. Interior of Inigo Jones' banqueting house, looking south.

in turn remained standing until it was destroyed by fire in 1619 and replaced in 1622 by the Banqueting House designed by Inigo Jones which remains standing in Whitehall today. Banqueting, however, was only one of the elements of performance taking place inside such a building. A formal banquet to entertain honoured guests was part of a wider schedule of entertainment which interspersed feasting with masking or disguising, music and dancing. The double temporary building built at Greenwich for the visit of the French ambassadors in 1527 was unusual in allocating banqueting to one building and masking to the other. In most other temporary and many permanent buildings different forms of entertainment jostled side by side with each other in the same space. This conception of 'theatre' as part of an ongoing continuum of

entertainment and performance is important both for understanding what theatre was and how plays sat alongside other forms of entertainment without very clear-cut distinction in the early period, and for understanding what a novel idea playhouses were at the end of the sixteenth century. Even as late as 1614 the Hope Theatre was designed to do double duty as a playhouse and a bear-baiting arena (although in practice it was mostly used for bear-baiting after 1617).

Coming at a building like the Hope from this distance in time, without paying attention to earlier tradition, can result in a patronising approach that overemphasises the 'popular' roots of Elizabethan theatre and condescends to some notional conception of lower-class pleasures, highlighting the presence of whores and cutpurses in the audience and the closeness of theatres to brothels and gambling dens. While it is certainly true that tradesmen and apprentices frequented the theatre and that theatres lay adjacent to other pleasures, the consumption of theatre as part of a cocktail mixed with other forms of entertainment is equally certainly not only a lower-class phenomenon. Just as public theatre allowed for an audience that might enjoy both bearbaiting and plays, and liked to see a bawdy jig or some dancing at the end of the play, so courtly entertainment might lead the court through a day of exciting physical exercise and spectacular viewing in the form of a joust or tournament into an evening of music, feasting, dancing and drama. But the point again, as with the false rigidity of modern distinctions between the religious and the secular or between ritual and drama, is that the boundaries between what we now seek to categorise as different forms of entertainment were less clear. The jousting, for example, might take place within a narrative framework which was then picked up by the indoor evening entertainments, perhaps costuming the dancers or setting the dramatic interlude within the same narrative frame. Nor, indeed, was the tiltyard without its theatrical set and costumes. Not only would the jousting knights and horses be costumed in rich and emblematic fabrics, colours and devices, but the Queen and her ladies might be watching the combat, themselves allegorically costumed, from a specially constructed spectators' box, devised to look like a castle.

Both tiltyards and indoor halls also hosted mobile stages in the form of pageant cars, which typically entered the space with a number of costumed performers on board, who then descended to enter the wider space, sometimes to speak and possibly to fight or to dance. Even fighting, however, was not, as one might imagine, restricted to the tiltyard, but might take place in an indoor space. Hall recounts one event in which combat, dance and dialogue were all part of the same extended drama, a barrier suddenly dropping down in the hall at the point of combat.

> When the King and the Queen were set under their cloths of estate, which were rich and goodly, and the ambassadors set on the right side of the chamber, then entered a person clothed in cloth of gold, and over that a mantle of blue silk, full of eyes of gold, and over his head a cap of gold, with a garland of laurel set with berries of fine gold, this person made a solemn oration in the Latin tongue, declaring what joy was to the people of both the realms of England and France, to hear and know the great love, league and amity that was between the two kings of the same realms, giving great praise to the King of England for granting of peace, and also to the French King for suing for the same, and also to the Cardinal [Wolsey] for being a mediator in the same. And when he had done, then entered eight of the King's Chapel with a song and brought with them one richly appareled; and in like wise at the other side entered eight other of the said Chapel bringing with them another person, likewise appareled. These two persons played a dialogue, the effect whereof was whether riches were better than love, and when they could not agree upon a conclusion, each called in three knights, all armed. Three of them would have entered the gate of the arch in the middle of the chamber, and the other three resisted, and suddenly between the six knights, out of the arch fell down a bar all gilt, at the which bar the six knights fought a fair battle, and then they were departed, and so went out of the place. Then came in an old man with a silver beard and he concluded that love and riches both be necessary for princes, that is to say, by love to be obeyed and served, and with riches to reward his lovers and friends; and with this conclusion the dialogue ended.
>
> Then at the nether end, by letting down of a curtain, appeared a goodly mount, walled with towers and vamures [outer walls of a fortress] all gilt, with all things necessary for a fortress, and all the mount was set full of crystal corals and rich rocks of ruby curiously counterfeited and full of roses and pomegranates as though they grew. On this rock sat eight lords appareled in cloth of tissue and silver cut in quatrefoils, the gold engrailed [ornamented with curved indentations] with silver, and the silver with gold, all loose on white satin, and on their heads caps of black velvet set with pearl and stone. They had also mantles of black satin; and then they suddenly descended from the mount and took ladies, and danced divers dances.
>
> Extract from description of the entertainment at Greenwich for the French ambassadors, May 1527, Hall's Chronicle (first published 1548)

There is even a record of a full-scale tournament being staged indoors at an entertainment for Henry VIII mounted at Lille in 1513, the horses on that occasion being shod in felt. Though many studies of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre tend to concentrate first on Shakespeare and the public playhouses and second on a few Jacobean masques strongly focused on song and dance, the practice of incorporating combat and moving pageant stages into court performance did not come to an end with the early Tudors. The Four Foster Children of Desire, in the Elizabethan entertainment of that name staged in

1581, arrived at the Whitehall tiltyard the first day on a machine called 'a rolling trench' to besiege the so-called Fortress of Perfect Beauty and the second day in 'a brave chariot (very finely and curiously decked)';[31] and indoor masques at barriers continued to be performed through the Jacobean period.

> *a march being sounded with drums and fifes, there entered (led forth by the Earl of Nottingham, who was Lord High Constable for that night, and the Earl of Worcester, Earl Marshal) sixteen knights armed with pikes and swords, their plumes and colours carnation and white, all richly accoutred; and making their honours to the state as they marched by in pairs, were all ranked on one side of the hall. They placed, sixteen others like accoutred for riches and arms, only that their colours were varied to watchet [light blue] and white, were by the same earls led up, and passing in like manner by the state, placed on the opposite side . . . By this time, the bar being brought up, Truth proceeded.*
>
> Stage direction from *Barriers at a Marriage* lines 183–210, for the wedding of Frances Howard and Robert Devereux, January 1606

As the reference to the letting down of a curtain in the *Love and Riches* entertainment of 1527 shows, moveable pageant stages could be used in ways that anticipated later fixed stages. Though curtains were not installed in public playhouses before the closing of the theatres, court mask anticipated this later development, as it did so many other late developments of fixed staging, such as moveable scenic flats and the proscenium arch, developments brought into Jacobean court masque by Inigo Jones. Some of Jones' developments were truly innovative in an English context, but many of the features specific to masque staging, including most of the machinery for its spectacular effects, had been incorporated into masks and disguisings from the time of Henry VII, and were in widespread use in royal entries, Corpus Christi cycles and other forms of medieval theatre from at least the fourteenth century. Even the halpace (low platform) on which the King's throne was set for court masque was not new or specific to that form; halpaces had for many years been specially installed in churches for major events such as royal weddings so that the ceremony could be better viewed by the congregation. Jones certainly drew on Italian theatre and architecture for his designs and effects, but in so doing he was also drawing on a courtly tradition long established in England that sought to rival European precedent and impress European visitors through theatrical display.

Connections: court, civic, household and public theatre

Court theatre was not all a matter of masque, of course. Even under King James and his queen, Anna (who was mainly responsible for the major revival of masque in the early seventeenth century), much of the court's viewing was of invited performances, either by the monarch's own players, by his or her Chapel Gentlemen and Children, or by other companies.[32] At this level there truly was an exchange of theatrical commodities. Masque was exceptional in being performed once only and only at one, relatively elite venue, such as the court or a noble household.[33]

Various forms of court entertainment, however, were closely linked to civic entertainments from an early date. This connection is at its most obvious in royal entries, which aimed to entertain the monarch and the city together; but civic events such as the Midsummer Watch, the Lord Mayor's Show and even military parades, had strong affinities with the processions and pageantry of court revels. It is also the case that sometimes the same writers wrote for both court and city. John Lydgate's mummings in the 1420s and 1430s are an early case in point.[34] He wrote three for the court, three for the city of London, and one so far undetermined; and in addition he also wrote a description of Henry VI's entry into London in 1432 and an exposition of the pageants in a Corpus Christi procession. (The term 'mumming' is not clearly distinct from mask or disguising, and the manuscripts are in fact much looser than this in their terminology, describing these entertainments variously as 'ballades', 'mummings' and 'disguisings'. On terminology, see further chapter 4 below.)[35] Of the city mummings, one was written for a May Day dinner of the sheriffs of London; another was commissioned for performance before the Mayor by his own company, the Mercers; and a third was commissioned by the Goldsmiths' Company for performance before the same Mayor. But the format is not markedly different. All have a processional element, bringing in representative or allegorical figures in sequence; and all but one seem to have a single speaker pronouncing the text, which describes, or tells the story, or outlines the meaning of the figures presented. One, the *Mumming at Hertford* before the King, presenting some 'rude, uplandish people complaining on their wives', scripts a 'boistous [rough, coarse] answer' for the said wives, seeming to indicate dialogue; and two, the Mummings for the Mercers and the Goldsmiths, suggest that the presenter is costumed as a herald; but otherwise there is more similarity than difference between the court and civic shows.[36]

Most forms of theatre other than court and civic theatre toured, bringing adaptations of the same performances to very different audiences. It is impossible to know how far productions of the same play might be changed, in both content and staging, for different audiences and venues, but it is likely that different budgets and expectations changed the mode of performance significantly. Thus, while most town and village venues would have played in fairly bare spaces with few props, the court, accustomed to providing lavish costumes